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FUSION



2024

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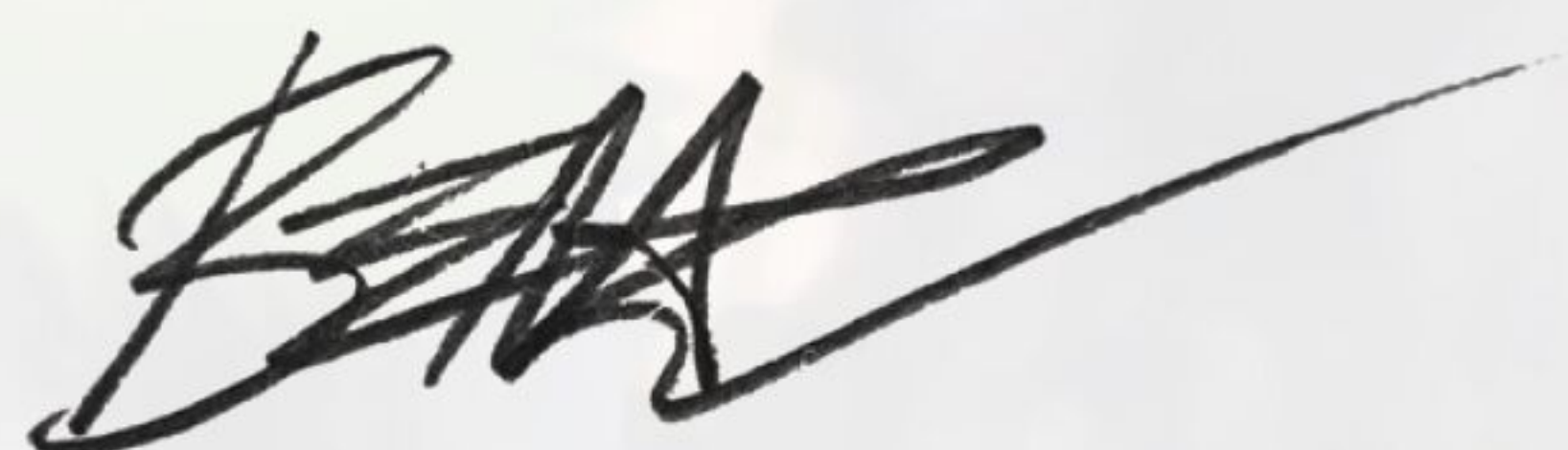
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FUSION

Welcome to FUSION! If this is your first time reading our humble games publication, you can expect a veritable kaleidoscope of articles covering the last fifty years of gaming, toys, and more. Whether your gaming habits are purely retro or you also enjoy modern systems and toy lines, we have something for you inside this year's annual tome. Everything inside is brand new. You'll find no reprints from previous issues of the FUSION monthly magazine here. However, if you'd like to read those, you can access all our back issues digitally via the fusionretrobooks.com website, along with a limited stock of the physical magazines.

2023 has been a special year for the FUSION team. Not only is this our fifth consecutive Annual, something worth celebrating by itself, but we are also about to publish our fiftieth issue of the FUSION magazine. The last five years have been fuelled by our enthusiasm for gaming, but most importantly, by a dedicated readership that we are eternally grateful to have. We hope that we can continue to entertain and inform you for many more years to come. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this year's annual.

MISSION START!



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FUSION Annual 2024

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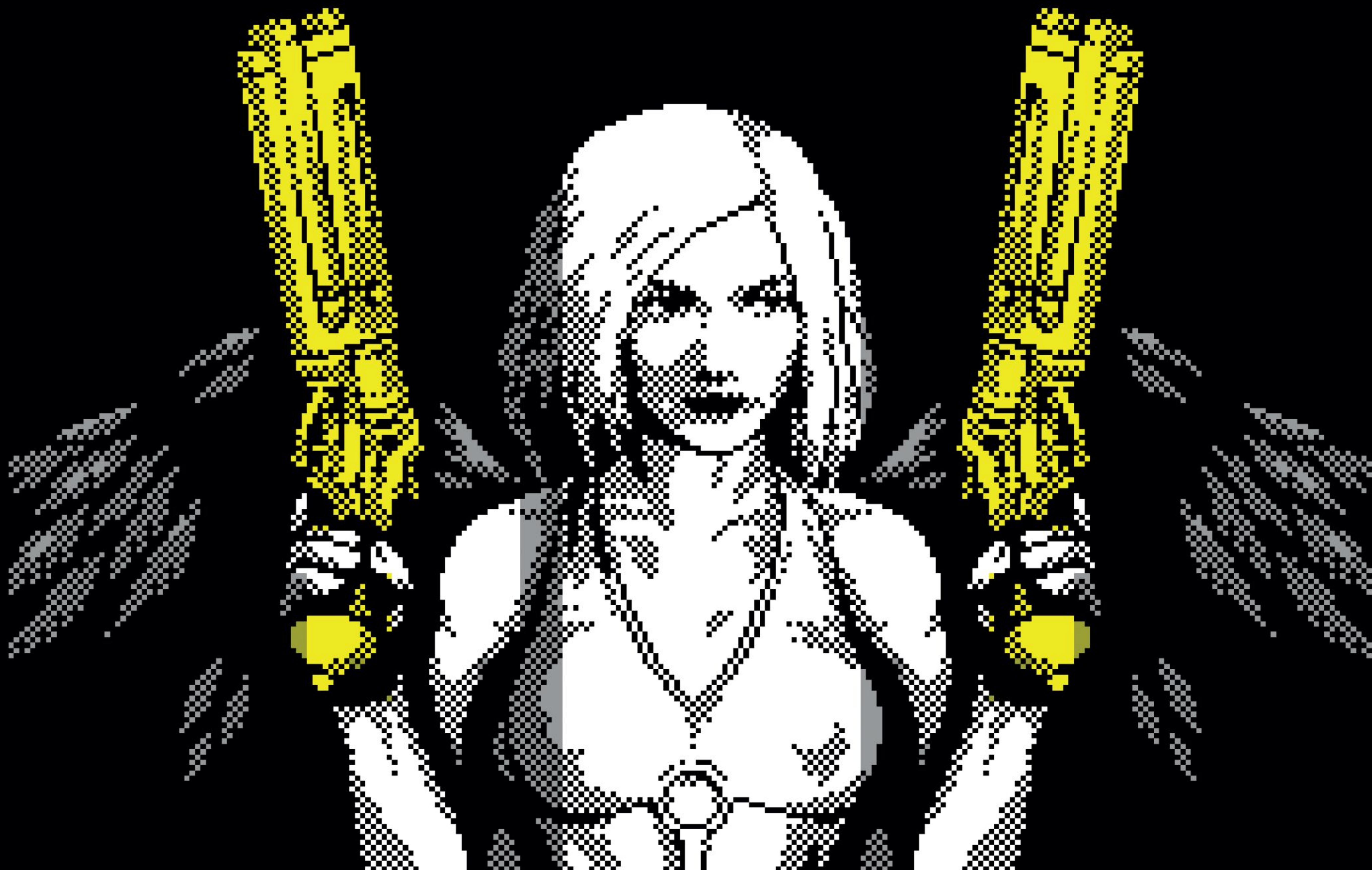
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EIGHT BIT HOMEBREW

IF YOU BOUGHT AN 8-BIT HOME COMPUTER IN THE 1980S, THERE'S EVERY CHANCE A PROGRAMMER OR TEAM OUT THERE STILL MAKES GAMES FOR IT IN 2023. ANDREW FISHER LOOKS AT SOME OF THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS FOR VARIOUS HOME MACHINES.

AMSTRAD

Renegade Reloaded is a clever update of Ocean's excellent conversion of the arcade game, adding in-game music and more moves. *Penguin Attack* from Pat Morita Team was one of the highlights of 2022's CPCDEV competition that gained a physical release this year. It evokes memories of classic Konami MSX games as the penguin throws and dodges snowballs. But it's the *Revenge of Trasmoz* from Volcano Bytes that you should be trying. It's the second game in what will become a trilogy, with the final part due soon. One or two players must light all the candles on a single-screen level, which requires the soul flames acquired from defeated enemies. Evoking classic titles such as *Tumble Pop* and *Rodland*, well-made graphics and sound are added to excellent playability.

Link: <https://bit.ly/3qWmech>



Above: *Revenge of Trasmoz* had a modern sequel funded on Kickstarter in the summer of 2023.

ZX SPECTRUM

Developer PuttyCAD drew admiration for *Gherbert Groundhog*, which is being converted to other formats, but it's their match-3 puzzle game, *Clone Zoo*, that I want to highlight here. Based on an earlier Android version of the game, it has great graphics that defy colour clash, cute cutscenes that introduce each new animal, and that classic "just one more go" gameplay. **Link:** <https://puttycad.itch.io/clonezoozx>



Above: By level 13, there are several types of animals to match, each introduced with a cute cutscene.



Left: Huffelduff has created several great VIC-20 games featuring speech (*Murderlize All Humans*).

VIC-20

The C64's older brother has been getting some great games recently, both for expanded machines and the original 3.5K. *Murderlize All Humans* from Huffelduff requires 16K but recreates ideas from *Berzerk* and *Robotron* as you shoot enemies and try to escape from a series of levels. The speech is brilliantly done. **Link:** <https://bit.ly/murderlize-vic20>

C64

There is one game from 2023 that should be in everyone's C64 collection: *A Pig Quest*. The Piggy 18 Team, composed of artist Alain Mauricet, programmer Antonio Savona, and musicians Aldo and Gaetano Chiummo, collaborated on this fantastic game. Five vast and varied levels of enemies and puzzles await, displayed in gorgeous, detailed graphics. The epic soundtrack and brilliant sound FX add to the atmosphere. One section even pays tribute to Antonio's earlier conversion of *L'Abbaye Des Morts*, recreating screens from that game. Controls are precise and accurate, and there are no complicated extra keys to press as everything is controlled with the joystick. This huge 1MB cartridge is filled with superb presentation, sprites, and backgrounds.

Link: <https://bit.ly/pigquest>

Below: After fixing a bug in the C64 game, *Revenge of the Mutant Camels*, Jeff Minter turned his hand to recreating an early PET game thought lost (*Deflex*).



COMMODORE PET

Remarkably, the Commodore PET continues to be pushed and stretched in 2023. The amazing Jeff Minter recreated his lost early game, *Deflex*, where the player drops mirrors to reflect a ball. Jimbo, though, is working miracles. *Pet Panic* goes back to the early platform game *Space Panic* as you dig holes through platforms and drop enemies through. *PETSCII Bros.* remakes the early Nintendo hit, *Mario Bros.*, for one or two players, with a clever little tutorial at the start.

Link: <https://bit.ly/433xUYa>



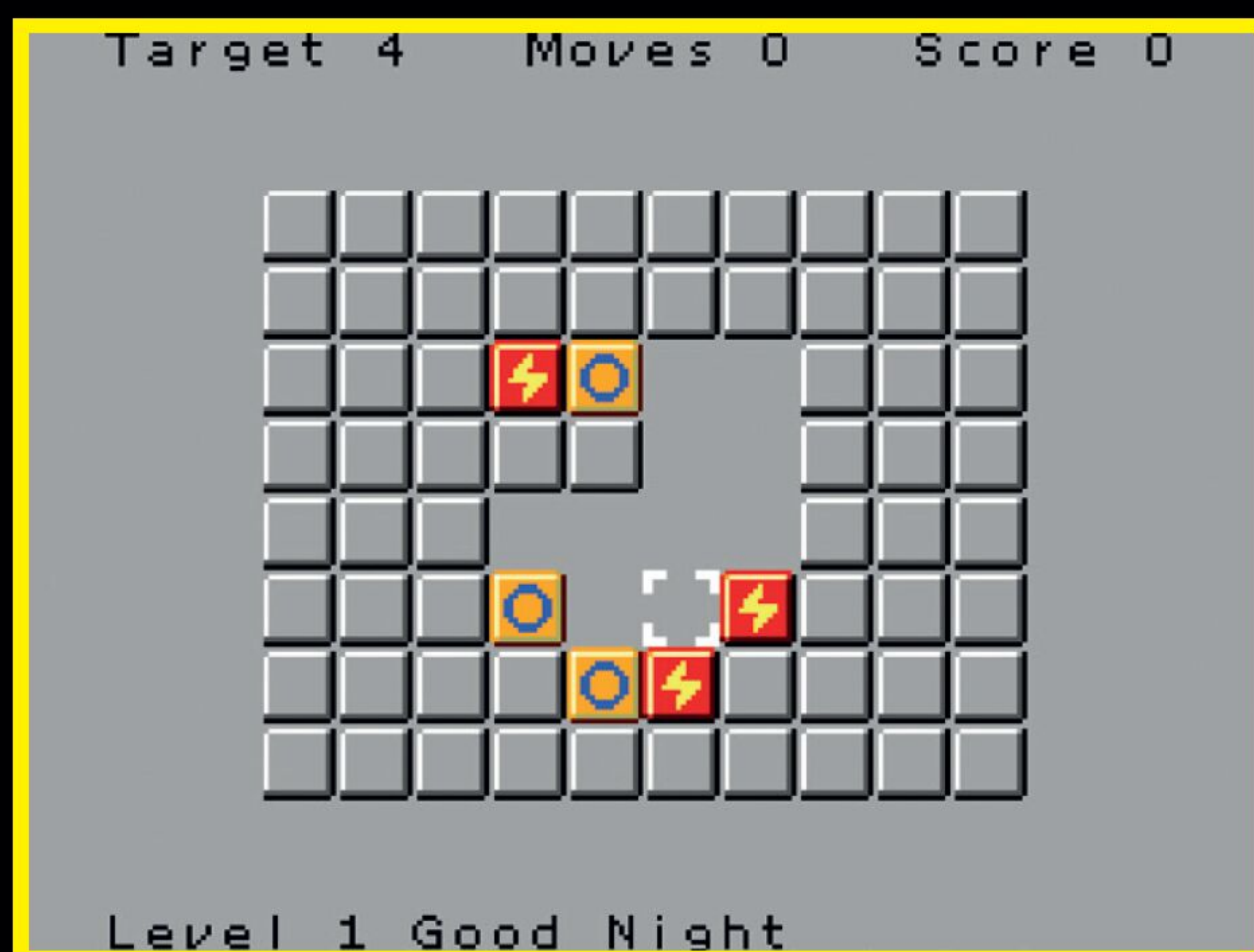
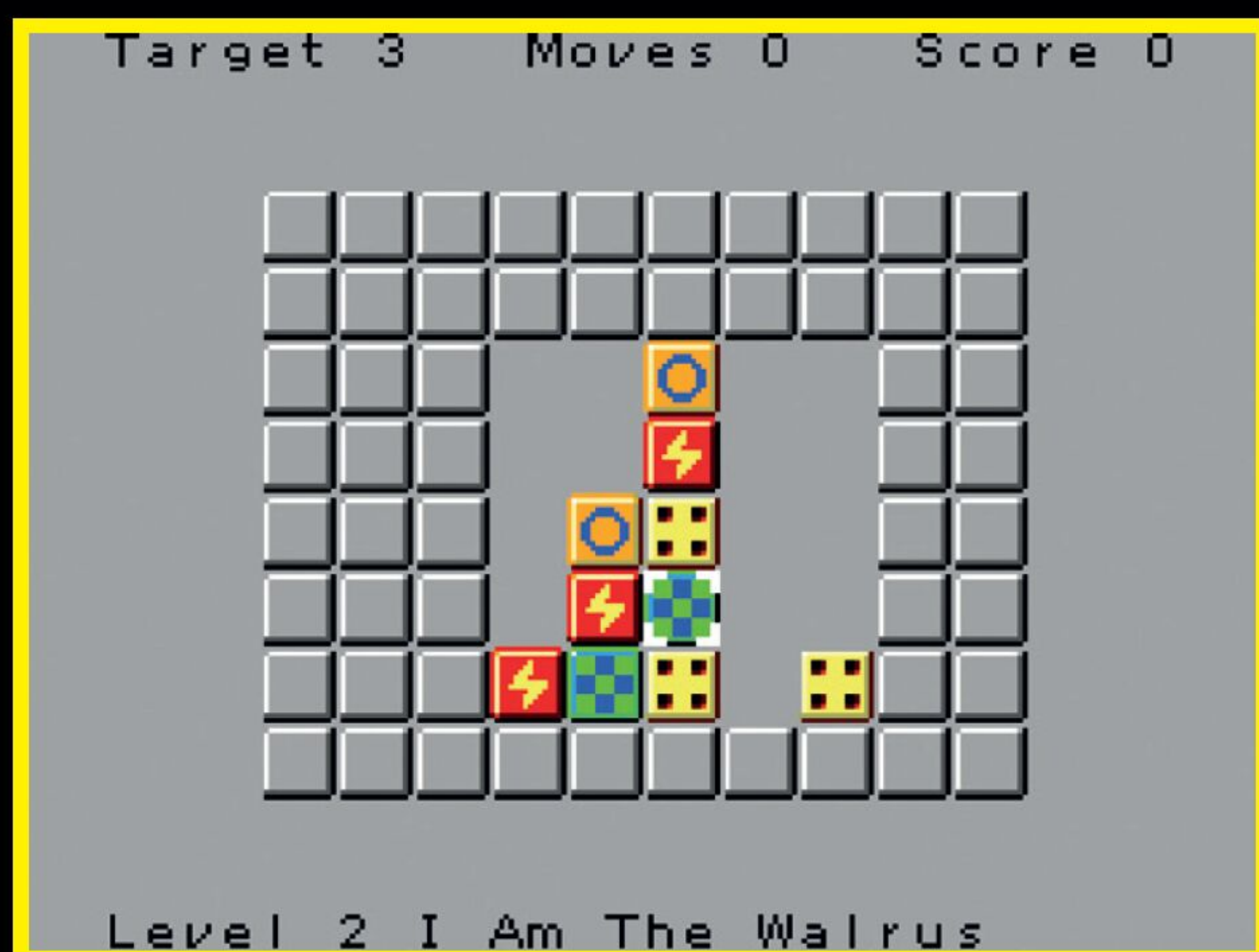
Above: The giant spider appears very early on in the game.

Below: Level 3's Trolls are large but can be defeated.



MULTI-FORMAT

We are seeing more and more coders attempting multi-format games. Developer Under 4MHz unleashed the puzzle game, *Vexed*, across over a dozen formats, with its tile-matching gameplay echoing the Taito arcade game *Puzznic*. Japanese coder Inufuto continues to dazzle with his latest platform game, *Cracky*, featuring platforms that crack and disappear, forcing you to plan your route carefully to collect all the stars and avoid ghosts. **Link:** <https://bit.ly/vexed-multi>



Above: The Master System version of *Vexed*, showing how all the levels are named after Beatles songs.

GAME JAMS AND COMPETITIONS

The Yandex Retro Battle v3, organised by the Russian retro computing museum, produced some great titles, including the winner - Spectrum hit *Seraphima* from ZOSYA Entertainment. The Retro Platform Jam 6 gave designers the “underground” theme, with entries including the multi-platform *Space Cavern Blaster*.

Link: <https://rgb.yandex.ru/?lang=en> ■

Right: The gorgeous angel Seraphima, with a fuller version of the game due to be released soon.



FUSION



Game : **Stray**
Year : **2022**
System : **PC, PS4/5**
Words : **Graeme Mason**

■ While *Stray* is far from the first videogame to cast the player as a cat, it's certainly the closest the medium has come to reflecting our feline friends' carefree, agile and playful nature. When thrust into a post-apocalyptic scenario this simple creature journeys across a strange city inhabited by a collection of generally approachable robots.

Stray begins in a cave, the eponymous star surrounded by three friends or family. Then, following one daring leap too many, it falls into the abyss below its world and into a strange city devoid, like everywhere else, of human life. From here, *Stray* explores its new surroundings, interacting with carpets (they need a good scratch) and pushing numerous paint pots into the streets below. Soon, the cute cat is tracking a series of intriguing messages and encounters what appears to be a human intelligence, wrapped up in a small device that conveniently straps onto its back.

Stray is a beautiful and whimsical game that teases its plot out in vague strands. There's a refreshing absence of collectables, or indeed hardly any items, which reflects the nature of the creature you are controlling. Guiding the athletic cat throughout various tight city streets is a pleasurable experience, and together with some beautifully balanced gameplay, it makes for an intriguing and elegiac experience. And while its ending is a little abrupt, the surrounding tale of sadness at a lost world and civilization is poignant enough to hold the game up throughout its brief running time. If you haven't had the chance to check out *Stray*, I heartily recommend you do so. ■





HOT BUZZ

MARK JOWETT GETS REVVED UP TACKLING THIS 80s STYLED RETRO RACER.

■ Insane Code's *80's Overdrive* attempts to take us back to the simple, 2D pixel racing days when the background was basic and repeated itself over and over again. If this makes you think of *Out Run*, then you would be spot on – this is by far the closest comparison you can get with *80's Overdrive*. The controls are also vintage, with the initial control map giving us A to accelerate and B to brake. However, I'm using an Xbox pad, and some things are better left in the past. Within minutes, I'd mapped those commands to the triggers instead. Much easier.

There are two main modes in *80's Overdrive*: career and time attack. The latter plays the most like *Out Run*, as you navigate each course before the timer runs out. The career mode encompasses 36 tracks ranging from beaches and forests to night driving in cities. The aim is



to progress up a leaderboard until you reach the top, which coincides with the final regular race in the line-up. As you progress in career mode, extra obstacles will be thrown at you, such as increased traffic, longer tracks and even the police, who will attempt to thwart your attempts by crippling your car and arresting you. However, once you have got to grips with the game, you'll find most of the courses are quite easy to breeze through, although there are some trickier tracks later on in the game.

Maintaining your vehicle is also vital in 80's *Overdrive*. You need to keep the car in tip-top condition and ensure there's enough petrol in the tank. Petrol and damage gauges will help you, but you constantly need to earn enough money to keep your vehicle in tip-top condition. Having cash also means you can purchase faster cars, upgrade them and install police-evading equipment such as nitro boost and a useful radar that tells you exactly where the law is on the track. Every now and again, a shady character





will come along with a challenge, enabling you to earn extra money. These objectives include intentionally losing races, picking up random packages on the track, or smashing a rival into oblivion. There are no consequences for doing these challenges, and we never get to find out who the shady dude is, but they are worth doing for the money and achievements if you are an achievement hunter.

80's *Overdrive* may be a simple racer, but the graphics are gorgeous in HD, with lush, colourful trees and bright sunshine bathing the screen. The background music tracks give the game an 80s feel and wouldn't sound out of place on a standalone album – with the amount of synth and dance, a fair few of them wouldn't look out of place on a Depeche Mode album either.

The gameplay is very fluid, with hardly any slowdown, and Insane Code has done a brilliant

job of keeping the framerate up while filling the background with objects and tracks with cars. 80's *Overdrive* is a game you can load up and be playing within minutes, but it's worth mentioning that the AI is prone to mistakes, although this isn't necessarily a bad thing as there's nothing worse than perfect opponents in a racing game. Citizens will also veer out of the way as you hurtle past, although sometimes they appear to drive at you for no reason like they are riding the dodgems.

For all its fluidity, ironically, the biggest problem here lies in the speed of the cars themselves – you never quite feel like you're racing at the breakneck high speeds that you feel you should be. It isn't Sunday driving slow, but it definitely veers more towards a standard motorway drive at times rather than a high-speed thrill. It's only a minor niggle, but it can sometimes be hard





to ignore when you're focused on the track. It is also worth mentioning that a track editor allows you to create and race on your own tracks. It isn't overly in-depth, allowing you to modify the amount of traffic, lanes, length, and so on. It's very similar to the *Lotus Turbo Challenge II* track creator from back in the Mega Drive days, but it doesn't add much to the game's replay value despite being a cool little extra.

While *80's Overdrive* is relatively new to Xbox users, it's been out on Nintendo Switch and Steam since 2020 and originally started life on the Nintendo 3DS. With this in mind, is it worth a purchase on the Xbox platform? Insane Code has confirmed that each version isn't merely a port but was coded uniquely according to its released platform. The console versions also have much more scenery, and the car's perspective has changed a little, so you can now see if any vehicles are behind you. Each version

isn't merely a rehash, making this a worthwhile purchase, and for those who haven't experienced it yet, this is the definitive version.

80's Overdrive is an absolute joy to play and an excellent throwback to the racing games of yesteryear. At under a tenner to buy it's an absolute must, especially if you like your retro racing games. ■



HOW GOOD

CAN THE

GRAPHICS

GET?



WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON

I am, and will most likely always be, geared towards retro-style games. I enjoy playing all the classics from my nostalgia-fuelled brain, but I also play many new or modern games. Mostly these fall into the indie category and have some arcade-style slant to the gameplay. I review every shooter and pixel art game I can get my mitts on but never get involved with more extensive modern 3D games.

Due to the nature of my work, my ageing PC groans at me as it struggles to process the latest games - so I purchased a shiny new graphics card. Once installed, I ran some basic benchmarking software and was pleased with the results. However, I wanted more than just some ticks and percentages to base my new power on. There was only one thing for it: head out to the Steam sale and pick a new game to

show off my new toy.

After much deliberation back and forth, I settled on an open-world title that was originally a PlayStation game called *Horizon Zero Dawn*. It looked amazing in the videos showing off the gameplay, and I was drawn to the post-apocalyptic setting. I also liked that it was very serene, as if you could paint digital art by slowly moving the camera around. I was not disappointed as a vast sprawling world that seemed to go on forever into the distance unfolded. You can see from the images I captured that this is a beautiful video game.

Playing through the tutorial and the early parts of the game, *Horizon* gripped me, and that wasn't just because I was seeing some extraordinary visuals. It was the first time in a long time that an epic modern game awakened my love for up-to-date gaming. Albeit this game is now three years old, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted the latest PC releases for my PC from here on out. I haven't had a PC powerful enough to play such games



for many years, and now that lust for better graphics and new experiences has reignited.

Taking time out to enjoy the scenery has become a regular part of my experience with Horizon. You can slowly pan the camera across some mountain tops or take a breather in a wooded area that provides razor-sharp ray tracing images. The depth of the shadows and the level of detail in every leaf is incredible. It's spellbinding what these graphics artists can produce in these big-budget titles nowadays.

All this glorious onslaught of colour, shape, and animation poses an interesting question. Just how good can graphics get? Have we hit a plateau of what is possible to see with the human eye? How many more polygons, animation frames and colours can they get on the screen? Other recent games I've seen, such as *Hogwarts Legacy*, *Halo Infinite*, and *Resident Evil IV* remake, have blown my mind while watching my boyfriend play them on his Xbox Series X.

The level of detail and draw distance look almost real if you squint your eyes, and only with some close inspection can you see the imperfections on the character's hair or faces. This level of detail has been with us for some time now, especially when considering high-end PC gaming. My new GPU toy is not top of the range, but the level of detail reaching far into the distance is more than my ageing eyes can sometimes comprehend. I've seen several notable game journalists bringing this topic up recently, and it does feel as though we have reached the top, at least for a while. Computers keep on the hurried track





of constant improvement in processing and graphical power, but is it now reaching a point where our eyes can't see all the benefits? I watched some videos about the latest enhancements to ray tracing and shadow movement, and the truth is, I was struggling to realise any real differences.

You could say that the actual graphics haven't improved that much in almost ten years. I remember seeing a PS4 on launch and being blown away by the graphics, but it seems the

graphical enhancements are now more nuanced aspects, such as more rays of light and the number of blades of grass per square inch. It could be due to my age and the fact it's harder to impress me, but I struggle to see the improvements in graphics over the last five years or so.

I don't say any of this to be negative. The fact we've hit a graphical plateau means there is room for the next true innovation in games. VR seems to be leading this charge, and maybe the next significant evolution in gaming is not how many hairs our character has on their head or how opaque the water is dripping from a background tap. Maybe the next big thing in gaming is true immersion, like Star Trek holodecks that may see a resurgence in old-style arcades to visit. Whichever way we look at it, our video games have never looked better, and we can wait in anticipation of what the future holds. ■

FUSION MUSICAL MARVELS

**GEORGE STURGEON
DUSTS OFF HIS GAME BOY
ADVANCE AND EXPLORES
A GHOST-INFESTED TOWN
IN *WARIO LAND IV*, TELLING
US WHY 'CRESCENT MOON
VILLAGE' IS OUR LATEST
MUSICAL MARVEL.**



Musical Marvel: Crescent Moon Village

Game: Wario Land IV

System: Game Boy Advance

Composer: Ryoji Yoshitomi

Year: 2001

Soundtrack Link:

<https://bit.ly/430RPXR>

SCAN ME!



■ Crescent Moon Village earns its position as a Musical Marvel for its unique approach to crafting a soundtrack that balances a catchy melody with some bizarre sound effects. Bringing the musical equivalent of abstract art to your ears, it won't take long for this composition by talented composer Ryoji Yoshitomi to grab your attention.

The *Wario Land* series has always embraced a wonderfully weird and whimsical approach to its level design. This fourth title in the franchise applies the same approach to the soundtrack, resulting in a unique accompaniment to a GBA game that was praised for pushing the system's graphics and sound capabilities to their limits.

SOUND DESIGN 🎵

Crescent Moon Village is a track that accompanies the player as they adventure through the stage of the same name. Wario is dropped into an old abandoned town with a crescent moon hanging above the purple-tinged sky. The musical adventure begins with a simple tune and the constant beat of a cowbell, with a smooth



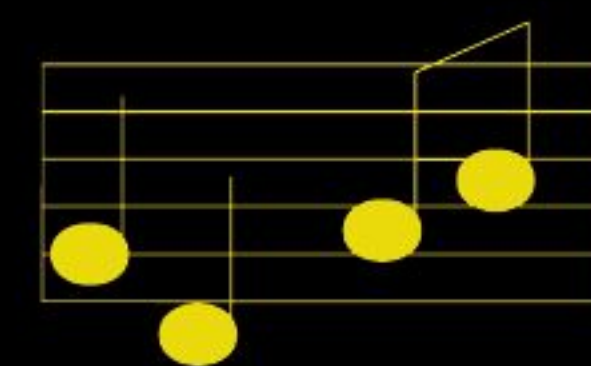


rhythmic melody and the haunting notes of a synth keyboard. But, this chilled-out tune is soon interjected by a chaotic cacophony of sound effects, which are frankly quite bizarre. In the fifty seconds it takes to introduce the player to the track, the sounds of a record scratch and the irregular groans of what seem to be zombies come into play. A subtle nod to the level's horror theme, perhaps.

Just under a minute in, the track finds its flow. Tempered and spooky tones meld together in an eclectic mix of haunting keyboard notes, ghoulish groans, and a funky, addictive rhythm that brings everything together. It reaches a crescendo with heavy drum beats and guitar strumming, only to circumnavigate back to the beginning again.

The world of *Wario Land* is eccentric and vibrant. It features oddball environments and themes so strange that they shouldn't work as well as they do. The unpredictable nature of the *Wario Land IV*'s soundtrack is its greatest strength, and the likes of Crescent Moon Village help redefine everything we thought we knew about video game music.

CONCLUSION



Crescent Moon Village dares to be different by confidently connecting sounds and symphonies to create a unique and memorable signature tune that grows in intrigue the longer you listen. ■

Battlestar GALACTICA™



TV PHOTO CARDS
WITH 1 STICK BUBBLE GUM

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**CARL PACKIN, AKA WAX
PACKIN' FLEES THE CYLON
TYRANNY AND JOINS A RAG-TAG
FUGITIVE FLEET ON A LONELY
QUEST FOR BUBBLEGUM.**

■ The sci-fi space spectacular 'Battlestar Galactica' blasted off on American television screens in September 1978 with a 148-minute feature-length pilot episode titled 'Saga of a Star World'. As Battlestar Galactica carried on as a weekly TV show, American kids who could not get enough of their new heroes were bubble-blowing their way through the latest wax pack craze - Battlestar Galactica bubblegum cards!

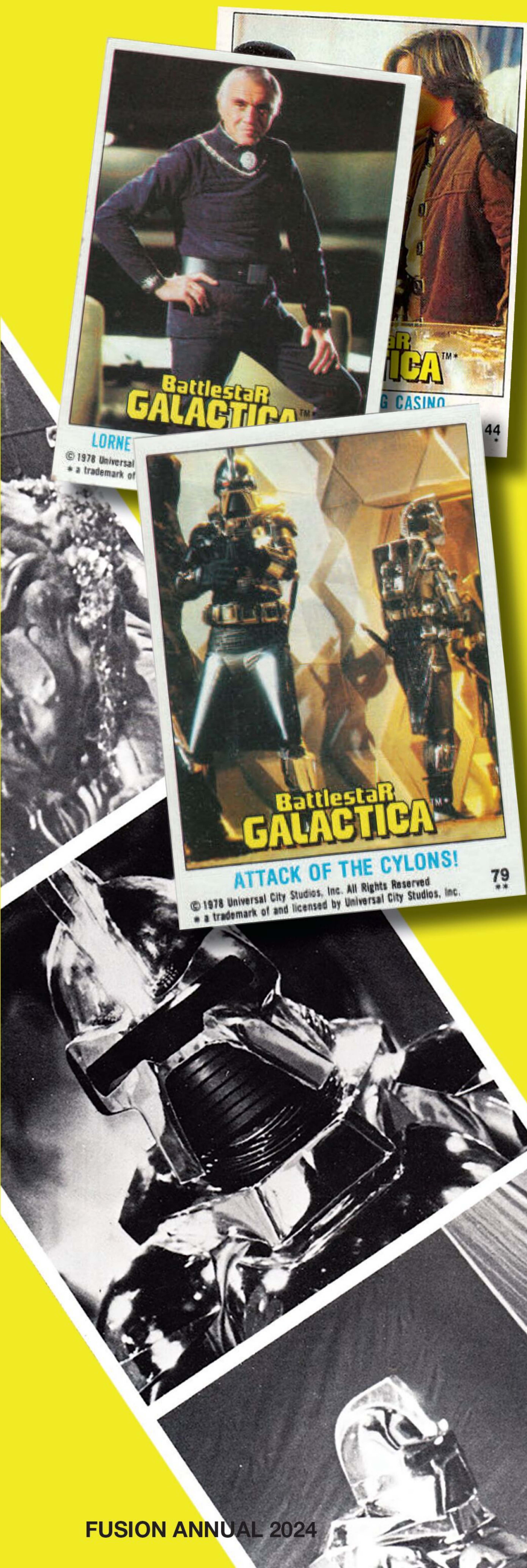
As was usual back then in the UK, we had to wait an extra six months or so for the 1979 Battlestar Galactica theatrical release to hit our cinemas. Still, the awesome thing was, thanks to Topps Ireland, we also got the bubblegum cards.

Released in the UK in April 1979, the Topps Ireland Battlestar Galactica wax packs came 48 to a box. The UK display box had slight variations to the US release with a price flash change to 5p and any evidence of sticker cards removed. I wonder if any British school kids actually knew their US counterparts had stickers in their packs?

The set documents the plight of the mighty Battlestar Galactica and its crew as they lead a "rag-tag fleet" across the galaxy, fleeing the tyranny of the evil Cylons and all the while searching for a shining planet called Earth. With 132 cards, Battlestar Galactica is one of the biggest ever non-sport Topps sets released as a single series.

Cards have white borders and are numbered bottom right. They proudly display the set title in yellow, centred above a caption panel with blue lettering which also includes copyright information (note to collectors: the copyright year denotes the year of copyright, not necessarily the year of manufacture).

The pack features stills, behind-the-scenes photos, and publicity shots (some of which have obviously



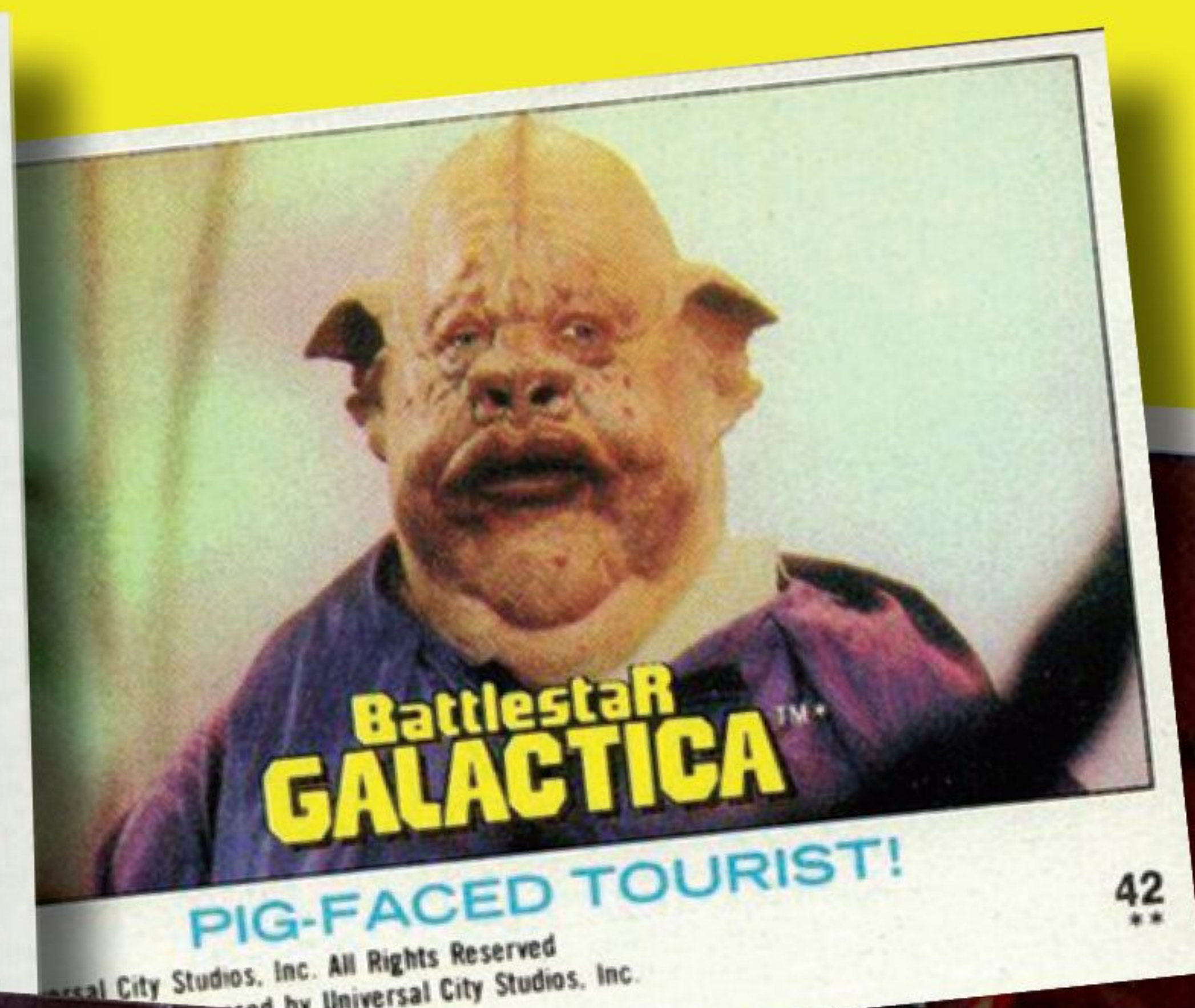
been taken in the studio car park), mixed with exciting laser battles and space dogfights, highlighting the fantastic models and special effects of the show. This set is a fun insight into (and I'm going to be bold here) the best sci-fi show of the 70s. A huge number of the cards have also been dedicated to the menagerie of Battlestar Galactica's alien species: Cylons, Ovions, Daggits, and Borays appear over captions like "Destroy the Human Vermin!", "Army of Evil", "Night of the Metal Monsters", and (oh dear) "Pig Faced Tourist".

The card backs give us sixteen 'Cinema Facts' about the show's creation, with interesting quotes from producer/writer Glen Larson and special effects 'wizard' John Dykstra; the US cards are titled TV Facts. Eleven Character Profiles give us in-depth descriptions of the show's characters, as well as twelve Story Summaries, which, to be honest, provide quite an odd description of the film's

events, with the Cylon race first being described as "The Alliance".

The US card backs had twenty-one TV Facts, whereas the UK set only had sixteen Cinema Facts, with numbers 1,2,3,5, and 6 repeated twice. This modification replaced quotes from Glen Larson in the USA set, referring to Battlestar Galactica as a "weekly show", which would have confused us British kids! The rest of the card backs feature two (rather hard) 44-piece puzzles: one is of the iconic Robert Tanenbaum 'Cylon Attack' artwork (also featured on the counter display box), and the second is of a (very dark) random Ovion going about his business.

It was a shame the show was cancelled after its first season because a second series of Topps Battlestar Galactica cards was planned and got as far as the test printing stage. They were cancelled due to the show's failing ratings. Once in a while, these ultra-rare test print cards





pop up on the secondary market, but most are residing in private collections. Such is the love for the original Topps set that Rittenhouse cards released a 54-card Battlestar Galactica 1978 expansion sub-set with their 2005 'Complete Battlestar Galactica' release. These cards focus on more of the original Battlestar Galactica episodes and are a fun accompaniment to the original bubblegum card set. They are also numbered consecutively from 133 to 186 to continue seamlessly from the original set.

The rediscovery of my Battlestar Galactica cards in an old Clarks shoe box, in the deep recesses of my parents' loft a few years ago, rekindled my love for the 70s and 80s bubblegum cards. Battlestar Galactica, Superman, Star Wars, The Black Hole, Star Trek, Gremlins, Michael Jackson, The Goonies, and The Garbage Pail Kids were all released by Topps Ireland and collected by my younger self with a youthful zest

that I thought I'd long since forgotten. This time around, I'm keeping them safely in a folder which I flick through occasionally, instantly transporting me back to my childhood years.

Those searching for a Battlestar Galactica bubblegum nostalgia trip can still find these Topps Ireland sets on eBay. In my opinion, they are the better set compared to the US cards, although if they were released today, they would have to carry a "contains tobacco depictions" warning due to all of Starbuck's cigar smoking.

Unfortunately, full Topps Ireland Battlestar Galactica boxes have not fared well over the years. The bubblegum in the unopened packs tends to dissolve into a sticky mess, damaging the cards and wrappers and sometimes even leaking through and damaging the box, rather than just harmlessly solidifying in the wax pack. I pray to the Lords of Kobol I may, one day, find an unaffected box. ■

The background of the entire page is a promotional image for the game *Hogwarts Legacy*. It features the Hogwarts castle perched on a cliff, with a large, ornate title 'HOGWARTS LEGACY' in gold lettering across the top. Above the title, 'PORTKEY GAMES' is written in a smaller, similar font. In the foreground, a character in a blue robe stands on a rocky outcrop, looking out over the landscape. The sky is filled with soft, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. A dragon is visible on the far left edge.

PORTKEY GAMES HOGWARTS LEGACY

THE TRAILERS FOR *HOGWARTS LEGACY* CAST A SPELL ON BEN HONEBONE, BUT IS PORTKEY GAMES' LOVE LETTER TO HARRY POTTER GAMING'S GOLDEN SNITCH OR A LESSON IN THE DARK ARTS?

■ I've never read the Harry Potter books, and I'd never seen the film adaptations until recently, but the preview footage for *Hogwarts Legacy* hooked me in without any prior knowledge of the franchise. Flying through mountainous vistas on a broom, combo-based wand combat, and open-world gameplay all looked enthralling. So, after deciding to try something different from my usual sci-fi/horror gaming tastes and offering up my debit card for the ritual sacrifice, I was admitted to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

I'll get right to the point and say that *Hogwarts Legacy*'s intro blew me away. After some brief character creation, I was completely swept up in an adventure that introduced me to the story, characters, game concepts, and controls smoothly and interactively. By the time the rolling sequence of events halted and I was able to



Above: The enemy variety in *Hogwarts Legacy* is somewhat lacking, but it doesn't spoil the thrilling spell combat.



choose what to do next, I was extremely eager to start my journey and had been given complete freedom to decide how to do so.

Events in *Hogwarts Legacy* take place one hundred years before the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends, so there are no familiar faces or cameos here. But anyone who's read the books or seen the films will feel right at home. Portkey Games have pitched the atmosphere and feel of Hogwarts Castle

perfectly. It's a living, breathing world with talking gargoyles, mischievous ghosts, shifting staircases, and more puzzles and secret rooms than the Spencer Mansion and Raccoon City Police Station combined. The living paintings are a particularly superb detail in a game filled with superb details.

The story itself sees you joining Hogwarts school during the final year and playing catch-up with the rest of the students. But, there is ancient magic afoot, magic only you can detect and wield, and the powerful wand-wielding Goblin, Ranrok, and his loyalists are waging war. Between attending classes, learning new spells, and going on adventures that advance the story, you'll be distracted by an endless supply of side quests, puzzles, and 'collectathons'. All of these distractions proved irresistible and despite the familiar trope of "go there, do this, go back, get this", I found myself wanting to complete every Merlin Trial, collect every Field Guide page, win every broom race, help every student or villager, and open every locked door.

The simple joy of exploring and stumbling from one curious discovery to the next is, perhaps, *Hogwarts Legacy's* most potent charm. Many open-world games have

sprawling maps that are overpopulated with icons begging for your attention, and it's often overwhelming. However, *Hogwarts Legacy*'s map, though large and filled with needy icons, never feels like too much because you spend much of your time finding things without looking for them. The game world looks gorgeous and is filled with character. Plenty of pleasing little details are buried in the mountains and villages, indicating the love that has gone into creating this game.

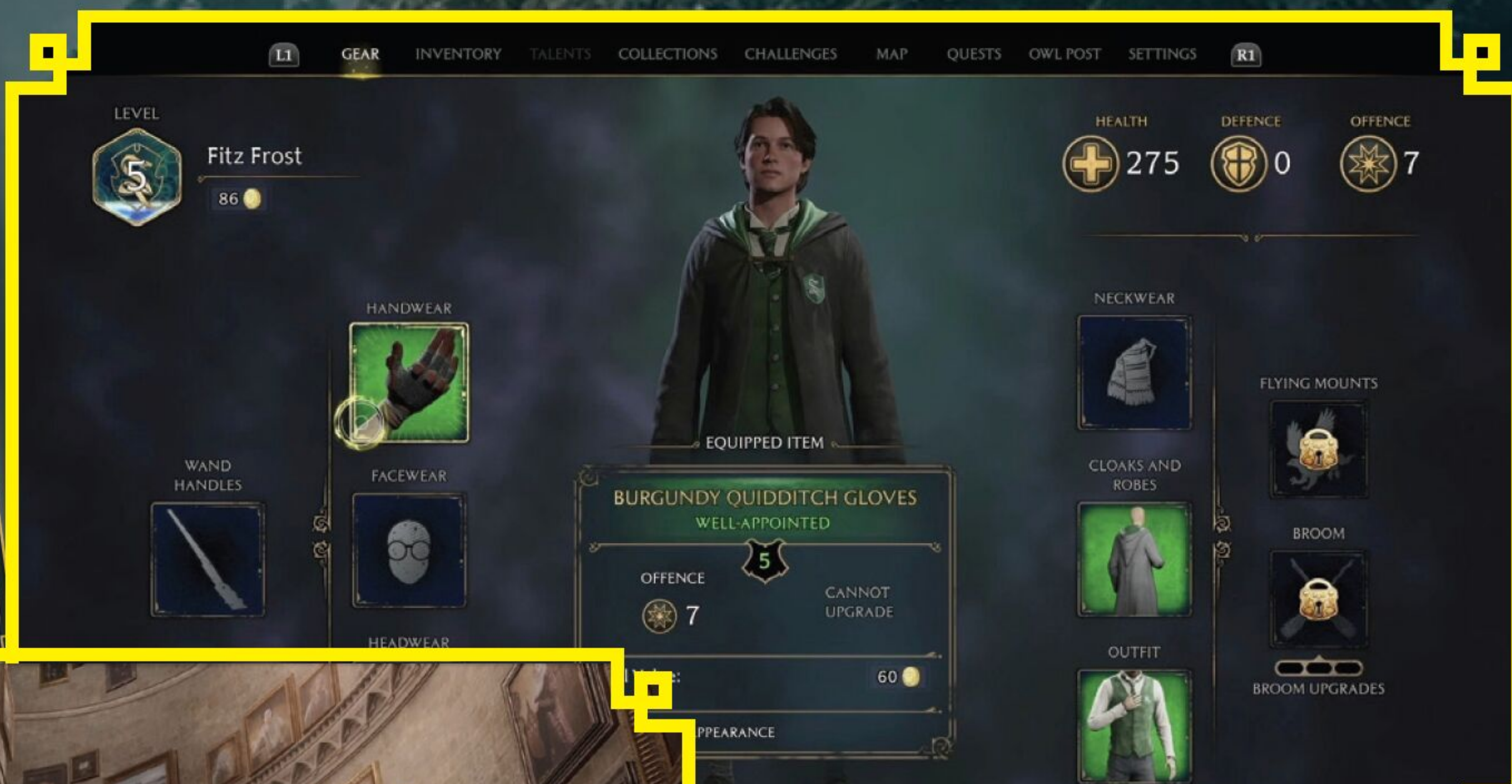
The most defining feature of the Harry Potter universe is the magic itself, and Portkey Games have done a fantastic job of tying the concept of wands and spells into an easy-to-grasp combat system that feels responsive and exciting. With colour indicating the strength and weakness of magic, you'll often need to tweak your spell load-out to suit each encounter before casting multiple spells in a string of devastating attacks. Once you've neutralised your opponent's shield, you can flip them into the air and continue your assault with multiple spells, throw objects from the environment, and finish them with powerful Ancient Magic attacks. There are also parry and counterattack spells available that, when combined with basic attacks, allow you to execute graceful combat sequences that

wouldn't feel out of place in a fighting game. Magic-enhancing potions and some very aggressive plants are also on hand to assist you. You can purchase these from traders or brew and grow them yourself in the 'Room of Requirement' once you have learned the necessary skills.

Another vital component of *Hogwarts Legacy*'s charm is its characters. You'll form relationships with your professors and fellow students as you progress, and they all have



Above: You'll see most of the pop-in occur when you're flying around on your broom, but it doesn't spoil the view.



Top Right: You'll find plenty of loot on your travels. Upgrading and enchanting your load-out is essential to your success.

Above: The Enchanted Staircase is a beautifully realised highlight of Hogwarts Castle.

Right: Petting cats should be a mandatory feature included in all video games.



a lot to say. While many of them fall into a particular stereotype and can sometimes be annoying, I still found myself invested in their stories. The dialogue is well-written, and the multiple-choice answers often allow you to be less than courteous if you choose.

Performance-wise, I've sunk over sixty hours into *Hogwarts Legacy* and suffered no crashes or bugs (I honestly can't remember the last "tripe-A" game I played that didn't have numerous bugs or crash several times during my time with it). Even the 'Quick Launch' functionality on Xbox Series X works flawlessly, and loading times are acceptable. Visually, it's not top of the range, but it is still a beautiful-looking game. There is some noticeable pop-in occasionally, but nothing too

offensive. My only real complaint is the game's problems handling light. When moving in and out of sunlight, a bloom effect renders the sky white for one or two frames. Thankfully, it doesn't occur very often.

I'm not sure if I'll read the Harry Potter books. They're at the bottom of a very long reading list. But, after watching all the films recently (the first one is the best), I found my experience with *Hogwarts Legacy* more enjoyable and memorable. A contender for 'Game of the Year'. ■



When Games Mags Go Horribly Wrong

SIT BACK AND RELAX WITH YOUR BEVERAGE OF CHOICE AND PRETEND YOU'RE WATCHING CHANNEL 5 LATE AT NIGHT. JOIN OUR HOST, PAUL TWIST, AS HE EXPLORES WHAT HAPPENS "WHEN GAMES MAGS GO HORRIBLY WRONG".

■ Even our favourite games mags have been known to make a mistake from time to time, including the best of them, such as Your Sinclair and Amiga Power. And on the Fusion Discord, I've even seen some argue that FUSION Magazine "went wrong" when I confessed to not enjoying Impossible Mission in issue 42. A view that I suspect the rest of the Fusion team does not share [It would be boring if we all agreed - Ed]. So, let's run through some of the biggest faux pas made by games mags over the years.

Your Sinclair

A worthy rival to our very own CRASH, Your Sinclair offered an anarchic, irreverent take on the Spectrum magazine, written with a theoretical audience of 16-year-old readers in mind. However, many of the mag's actual readers were considerably younger than this. So, Your Sinclair would occasionally get in trouble when they pushed the envelope too far, such as when they gave away a sample issue of the (then) relatively unknown adult comic, Viz, with the November 1987 issue. Even though the bespoke freebie



Above & right: Guess which mag sold more at the time? You're probably wrong.

issue of Viz was considerably toned down from the ultra vulgar, mega-sweary regular issues of the comic, it was still a bit much for some of Your Sinclair's more delicate readers. It led to complaints and a throbbing mass debate across the mag's letters page for several months.

But that wasn't the only time Your Sinclair went wrong; they also found themselves in hot water when the mag later sported a cover promoting Martech's game *Vixen*, which boasted "page 3 stunna", Corrinne Russell, wearing nought but a leopardskin bikini. The raunchy



Above: Does the YS cover seem tame by today's standards?
 Right: Meanwhile, SU proves it's not to be sniffed at.

cover led to complaints, though it remains fondly remembered by many of the magazine's (then) young male readership.

Sinclair User

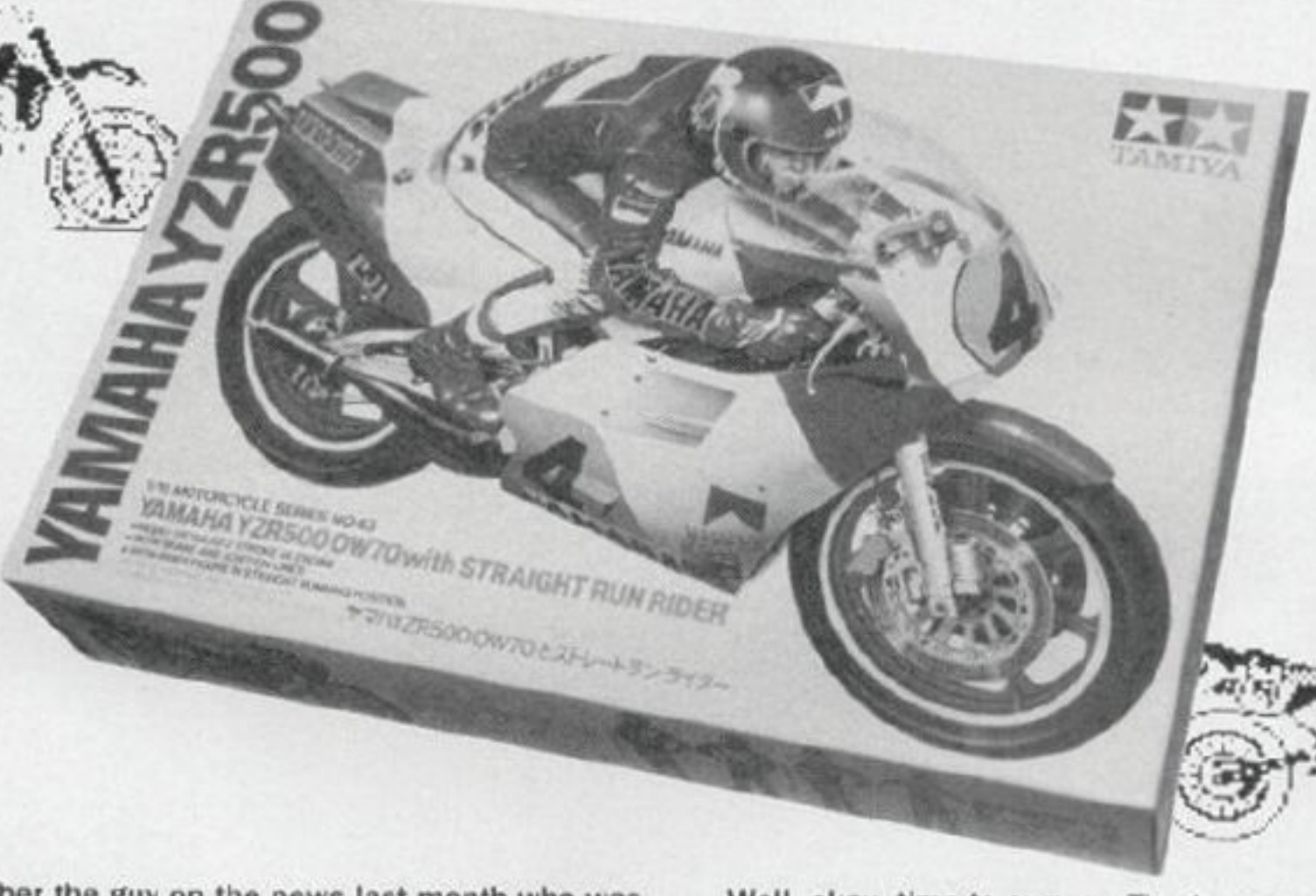
Your Sinclair certainly wasn't the only Spectrum mag to court controversy and go horribly wrong in the process. Beginning as a somewhat staid publication, Sinclair User would become edgier in its approach over time. Hence, perhaps, the creation of its cartoon mascot, Kamikaze Bear. A character who almost certainly wouldn't fly today (pun intended) due to its dubious racial stereotyping and flippant attitude to suicide. Even though one could argue that said cartoon bear is an example of "going horribly wrong", it's a much more controversial episode of Sinclair User's history in which we're interested here. In issue 82, Sinclair User made the following throwaway joke about glue sniffing in the text for a competition giving away model kits, "Just think of all the glue fumes you've now got an excuse to inhale."



If you're too young to remember the 1980s, you might not appreciate how controversial this seemed at the time. Glue sniffing was one of the tabloid campaigns du jour, and Sinclair User's bad-taste joke proved so controversial that it led to a very sticky situation for the magazine. It resulted in a tabloid outcry, which led to an "oh-so-sincere" apology in the following issue. I even remember my mum asking me if I had the offending issue in question and not wanting it to be confiscated; I lied that I didn't and hid my copy in my desk drawer.

COMPETITION

MOTORBIKE MADNESS



Anyone remember the guy on the news last month who was nicked for doing about two thousands miles per second on his motorbike? No? Well now is your chance to relive those exciting moments thanks to the spiffing people at Virgin Mastertronic.

In celebration of their extremely motorbikely game **Motorbike Madness** which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue, they've got 10 (count 'em) **Yamaha YZR500** road racers to give away, so you can get arrested as many times as you like.

The Questions

- 1) How many wheels has a motorcycle got (excluding stupid moon-hopper things)?
- 2) How many times is the word Motorbike mentioned in the title of Mastertronic's new motorcycle game?
- 3) Name the old film starring Dennis Hopper choc full of motorcycles

Name: _____
Address: _____

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____

No employees of EMAP, Virgin Mastertronic or anyone else may enter this compo. (Ha ha, only joking. You know you're all welcome here at **SU**!)

SINCLAIR USER DECEMBER 1993

Well, okay, time to own up. They're not real cycles, but even better; they're fantastic kits – complete with rider! – which you can lovingly assemble in the privacy of your own bedroom. Just think of all the glue fumes you've now got an excuse to inhale. And a further 20 lucky runners up will get a copy of the game. And what do you have to do in order to be eligible for one of these trouser-damaging prizes? Easy. Simply answer the questions below and send the coupon to: Mind the Red Light Competition, Sinclair User, 14 Holkham Road, Orton, Peterborough PE2 0UF.

SPECIAL IMPORTANT NOTICE PLEASE READ THIS. THIS IS SERIOUS UNLIKE MUCH OF THIS MAGAZINE

SU has received two letters from concerned parents complaining about the **Motorbike Madness** Competition in last month's issue. Their objections referred to a 'throwaway' aside in the copy about **Inhaling Glue Fumes**. It was a jokey remark, in keeping with the style of this magazine and we believe we know our readers well enough to feel sure they would treat it as a joke. However, lest there be any doubt about our attitude, **GLUE SNIFFING IS NOT A JOKE. IT IS DANGEROUS AND FOOLISH. SU COMPLETELY REGRETS ANY POSSIBLE IMPLICATION IN THE TEXT THAT IT IS ANYTHING ELSE.**

DRUGS ARE DANGEROUS. DON'T SNIFF GLUE.

WE UNRESERVEDLY APOLOGISE FOR ANY OFFENCE CAUSED.

Amiga Power

Amiga Power was a self-proclaimed “magazine with attitude”, but this “attitude” led the magazine into controversy a number of times. To tie into Sensible Software’s excellent *Cannon Fodder*, Amiga Power planned to feature a poppy on the cover of issue 32, but the Royal British Legion were none too happy with their logo being used for something as trivial as a computer game, leading to more tabloid furore. The cover was pulled prior to publication, which led the games journalist and controversialist Stuart Campbell (now a prominent activist campaigning online for Scottish independence) to make the following comment in that very issue: “Old soldiers? I wish them all dead.”.

That wasn’t the only time their self-described “attitude” got Amiga Power in trouble. Amiga Power’s letters page used deliberately out-of-context quotes from the letters as headings. One such quote was “Ocean are a crap company”, which Ocean believed was defamatory when devoid of the context of the letter (which complained about Ocean’s response to a complaint about its poorly-received space game, *Epic*). Ocean sued for libel and won.

Above: The offending competition description and the resulting apology. Don’t sniff glue, kids!

Below: The lovely looking but understandably controversial cover of Amiga Power. Don’t upset soldiers, kids!

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING AMIGA GAMES MAGAZINE!

AMIGA POWER

A MAGAZINE WITH ATTITUDE

TOTAL WAR

YOURS WITH ISSUE 32 OF AMIGA POWER

EXCLUSIVE!
THIS DISK COULD WIN YOU
£1000
OF SOFTWARE!
TURN TO PAGE 6 AND FIND OUT HOW

disk extra

YOURS WITH ISSUE 32 OF AMIGA POWER

3 GAMES ON THIS DISK

CYBERPUNKS
Raiders beware! Master Ghouster and Alien Syndrome have a dark mystery tale at night, in virtual space. Etc.

disk 32

WIZ 'N' LIZ
A whole host of levels from Pygmalion's 'Lute' two-player platformer.

SPACE INVASION
Yes, again.

AMIGA POWER

The game of the year – Exclusive Cannon Fodder review inside

Future Publishing
Your guarantee of value

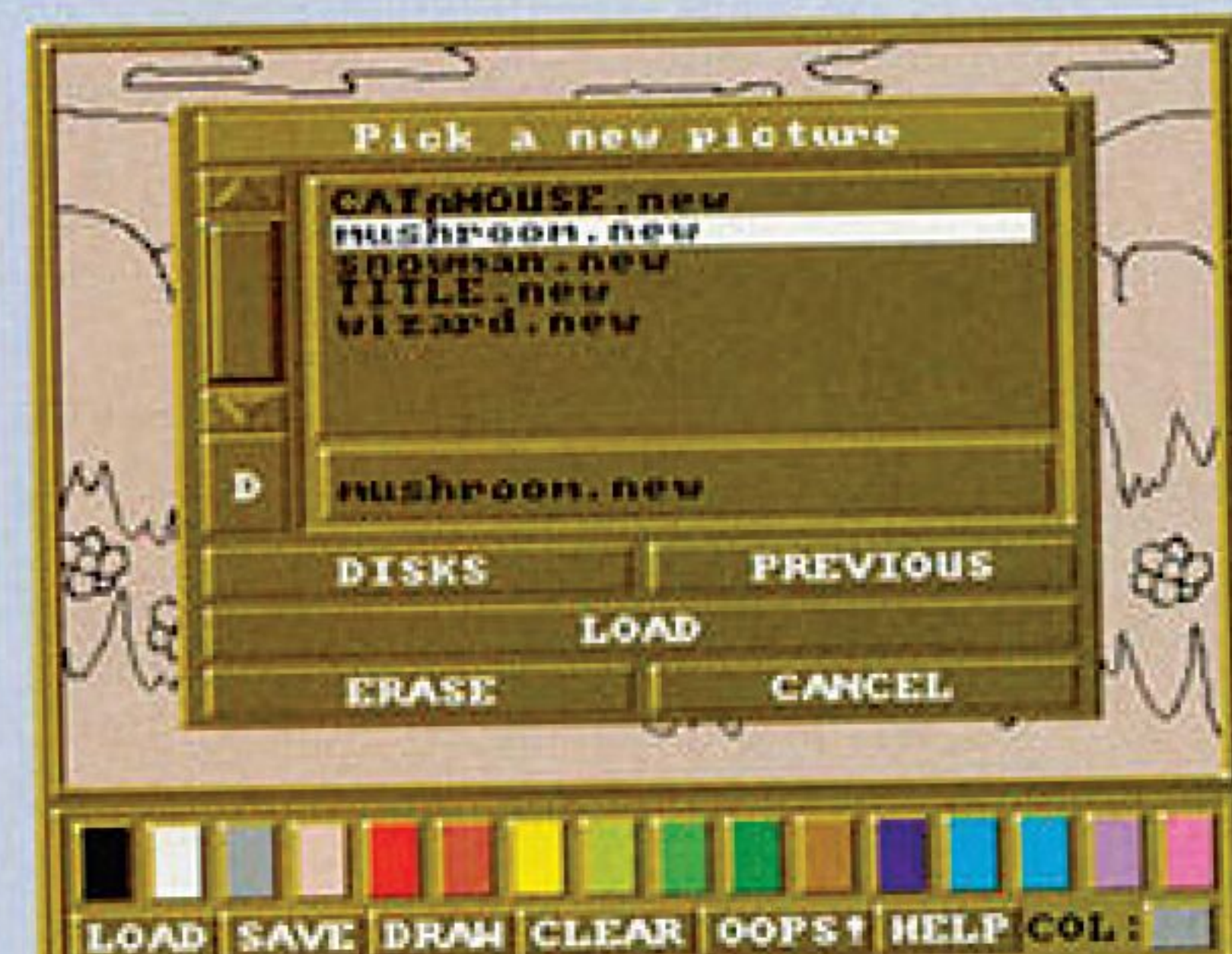
ISSUE 32 £3.95 DECEMBER 1993

TYPE SOME SHIT IN HERE PLEASE

The important thing about an art package for little hands is that it should be simple and clearly presented as well as good at what it does. We think you'll find that this is so simple you don't need instructions, but here they are anyway...



After the demo has loaded (this takes about a minute or so) you will be presented with a picture which colours itself in. To get started, click on the Load button - move the mouse pointer to it, and click once over it with the left mouse button.



After a brief message telling you that the full version will load IFF pictures too (Just click on OK) a menu comes up of all the pictures available on the disk. Simply click on one of the names, then on LOAD, and the picture will load, ready for you to start colouring it in.

'OCEAN ARE A CRAP COMPANY'

Dear AMIGA POWER,

A few weeks ago I wrote to Ocean saying somebody was selling pirated games at a market. I asked them what I should do, two weeks later they replied to me with a price list of games I can buy. I think Ocean are a crap company.

Yours, Chris Hughes, Harrogate

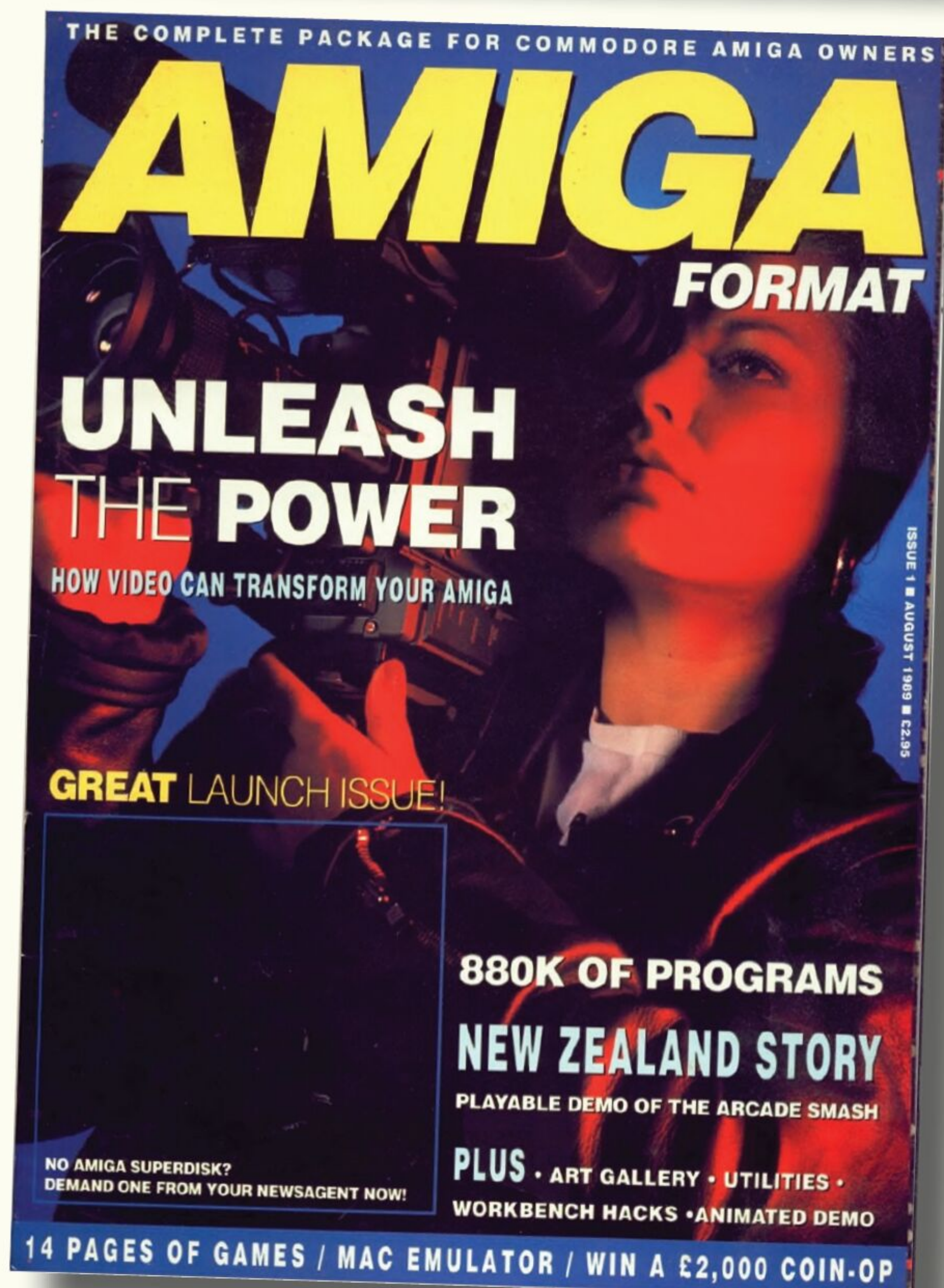
Above: Whoops! [Free tip - Lorem Ipsum doesn't contain profanity - Ed]. Right: Legally, and in actuality, Ocean were not "a crap company".

Amiga Format

Amiga Power's more grown-up sister publication didn't just write about games. It also covered "serious" Amiga software and hardware. Surely with this more mature approach, Amiga Format never went horribly wrong? I'm afraid it did.

When designers format magazine pages but don't yet have copy, they often drop in a dummy copy as a placeholder. The text tends to be what's known as "lorem ipsum", a block of meaningless Latin text. However, in this instance, some of Amiga Power's "attitude" had rubbed off on Amiga Format's graphic designer, who used the less conventional phrase "type some shit in here, please". At least they were polite about it. However, the dummy copy was not replaced, and the offending phrase accidentally made it to print. What was especially unfortunate is that the swears text was in a feature explaining how to use a cover disk featuring the children's art package Paint Pot 2.

And you probably thought that producing games mag was easy! Now you've seen some of the cock ups made by game mags over the years, I hope you have a better appreciation of some of the potential pitfalls faced by us brave mag makers who just want to entertain and inform gamers on the printed page. Bloody heroes, the lot of us! ■





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THE HEDGEHOG SONIC

AT

EDGE

WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON



1-2
PLAYERS



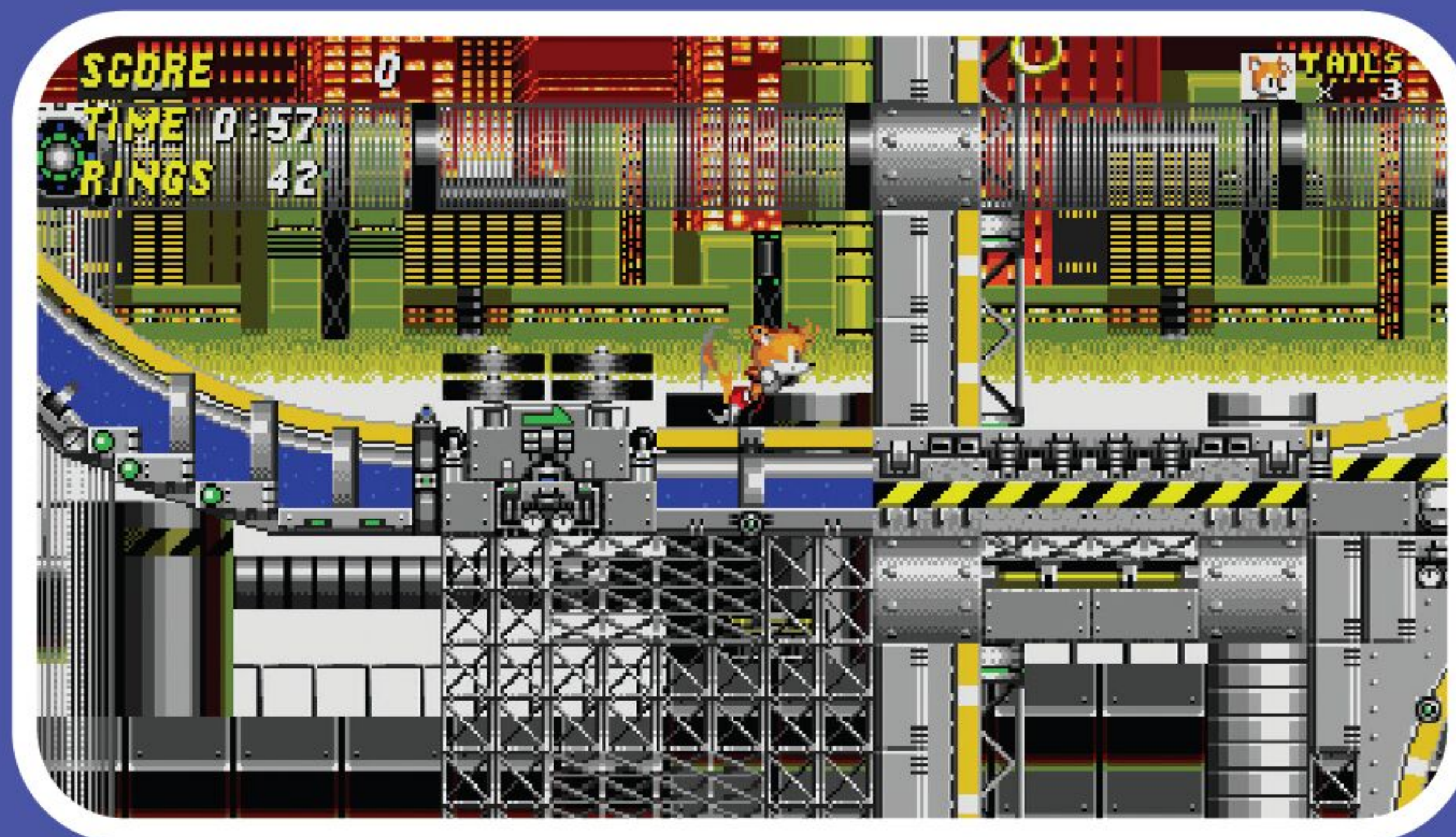
SEGA



Blimey, I feel old. I still remember when the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* game was released and even more vividly when its sequel arrived in November 1992.

There wasn't a magazine in the land that didn't have Sonic and his new friend Tails all over the cover. It was a massive event in the gaming industry, and Sega even toured the UK in a converted double-decker bus to show it off. Even the Nintendo gamers couldn't deny how much of an impact it had once it hit store shelves and received rave reviews.

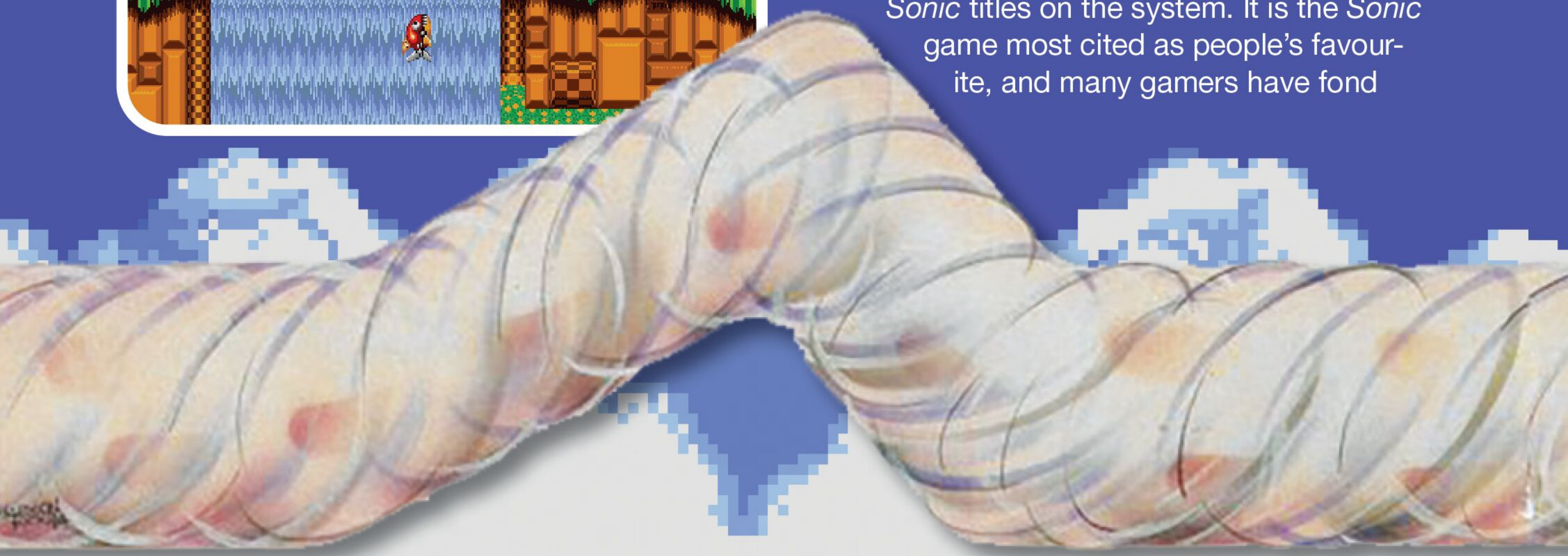
I remember getting it for my birthday several months after it was released, but I had rented it many times from the local video store beforehand. I even remember borrowing it from a friend that got it on release and had already completed it. Back then, it cost £44.99, which seems reasonable by today's standards, but it was a lot of money in 1992, and I had to give my parents some money to justify buying such an expensive game. But once I finally had my copy, it sat in that Mega Drive for months. I would play it over and over, never getting bored.



Before it was released, there were images of the graphics in the magazines, and the excitement grew. I remember seeing pictures of the Hidden Palace Zone, a level that would eventually be cut from the final release, and daydreaming about what I would experience. It felt like a lifetime had passed by when it finally arrived. I wasn't sure why I didn't get it for Christmas that year and instead received it for my birthday in 1993. My research suggests that the game was completely sold out across the globe two weeks after release, and it must have been that my parents couldn't find a copy.

My childhood memory aside, *Sonic II* is one of the most important video games released. It built on everything the original had achieved and set unmatched sales records for many years. The fanfare before release was also something new, and it felt more like a film premiere than a video game release. You could argue that *Sonic II* was one of the catalysts for making video games cool and bringing them to new audiences. The amount of publicity and merchandising suggested that Sega felt this was more than a game and held some cultural significance.

The game itself is one of the best Mega Drive games, even if it lacks the polish of some other *Sonic* titles on the system. It is the *Sonic* game most cited as people's favourite, and many gamers have fond



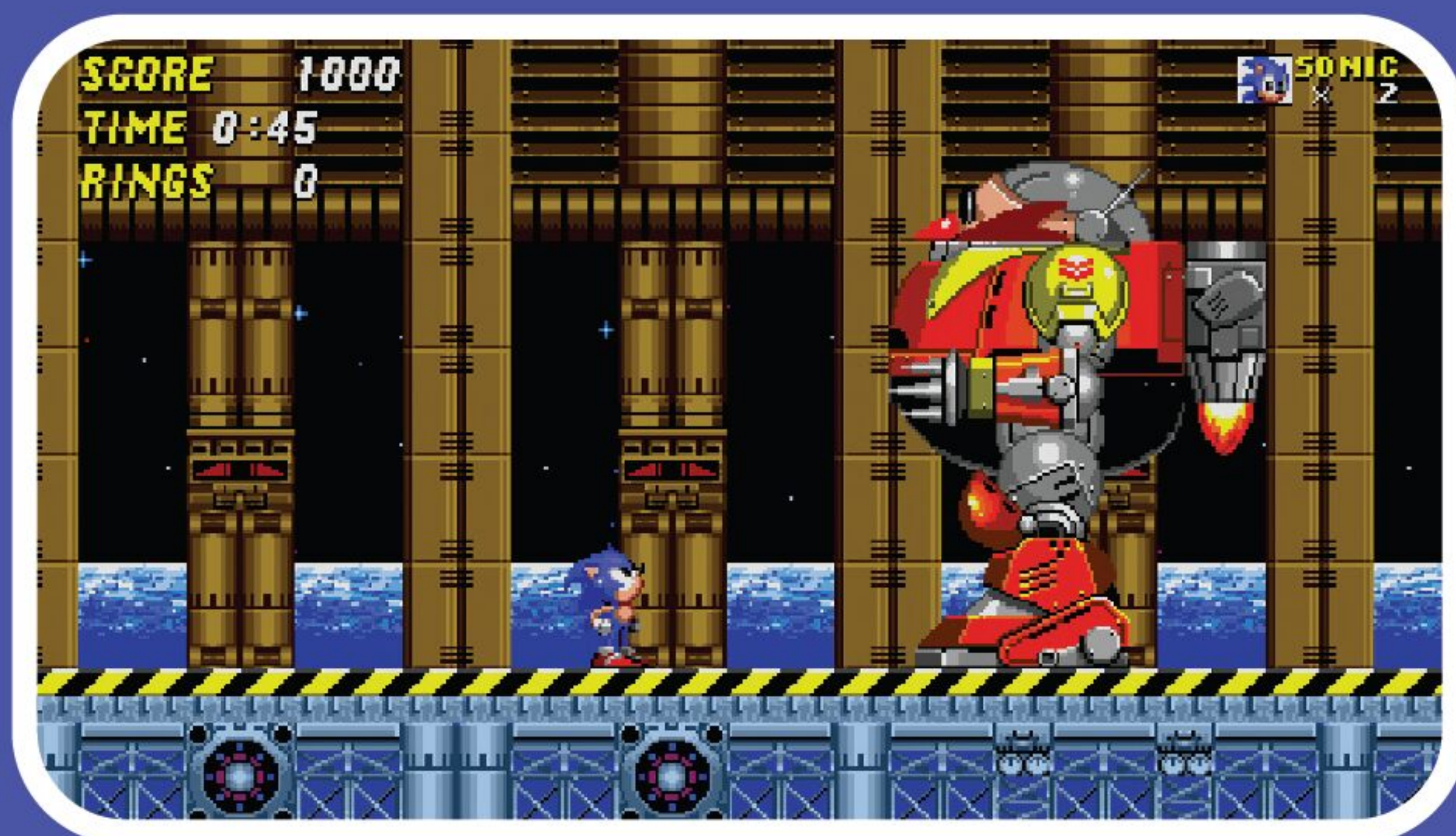
memories of playing it. Some argue it's too hard, but it's no different from the difficulty of other platformers of the time. *Sonic II* is also a big game for the time, and this was not lost on reviewers, with many commenting that it probably had a few too many levels. I'm afraid I have to disagree with this, as games were getting more extensive in the 90s, and *Sonic II* was part of the new breed.

One of the standout moments was getting all the Chaos Emeralds and turning into Super Sonic for the first time. Even if he was unwieldy to control, Super Sonic was fun to play and added an extra dimension to the game. And the special stages where you found those Chaos Emeralds felt like the future. The pseudo-3D effect of following Sonic through the half pipes, collecting rings, and avoiding bombs was magical back in 1992. We also can't forget the new Spin Dash move that allowed Sonic to move

even faster and attack.

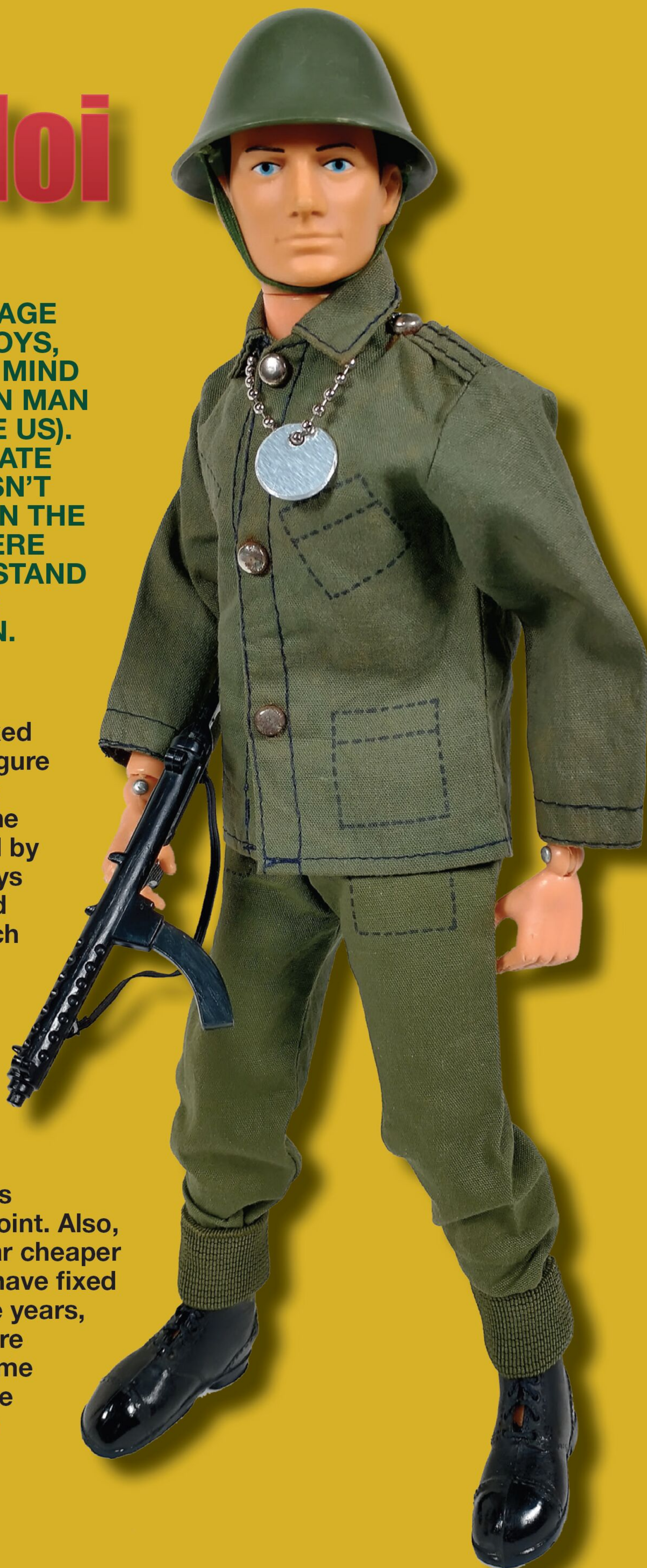
Then there is Tails, Sonic's friend and the new kid on the block. I hated Tails at the time and still do, but many found him cute, and it was a blast playing with a friend on the same screen. I remember playing with my brother, and we would use Tails as a shield, so it was easier for Sonic to defeat bosses. It was also our first two-player Sonic game, as you could race each other on a few levels. It was awkward trying to see where you were on the split screen, but we didn't care because it was just fun trying to compete for the bragging rights.

I still play *Sonic II* to this day, and with the updated HD and widescreen graphics on modern consoles, it plays better than ever. From the infamous last boss to the clever level design, *Sonic II* remains a quintessential Mega Drive title that cemented the "Blue Blur" as one of gaming's coolest characters. ■



WHEN YOU THINK OF VINTAGE ACTION TOYS AIMED AT BOYS, THE ONE THAT COMES TO MIND FIRST IS PALIToy'S ACTION MAN (G.I.JOE IF YOU ARE IN THE US). IT'S PROBABLY THE ULTIMATE "BOY'S TOY". BUT, HE WASN'T THE ONLY ACTION DOLL ON THE MARKET AT THE TIME. THERE WERE OTHERS, AND ONE STAND OUT OF THOSE HAS TO BE PEDIGREE'S TOMMY GUNN.

■ It's only recently that I picked up my first Tommy Gunn figure to add to my collection, having seen them occasionally over the years and not been that fussed by them. But the more I collect toys of all sorts, the more interested I get in the toys that didn't catch on enough to become big hitters, like the ones everyone remembers. Tommy Gunn tends to be a lot rarer than Action Man and can also cost quite a bit more, so I grabbed a rather rough-looking Zodiac Toys version on eBay that had fallen apart as it looked like a good starting point. Also, being in pieces meant it was far cheaper than a mint condition figure. I have fixed many Action Man toys over the years, and I knew I could get this figure back in one piece, and with some searching, I could source all the missing parts or make my own representations of them.





What's in a name?

The name Tommy Gunn comes from the infamous Thompson submachine gun patented in 1920 by its American designer, John T. Thompson. The gun was popularised by prohibition-era gangsters in the US and was referred to by its nickname, Tommy Gun, rather than its more long-winded full name. But that wasn't its only name. John T. Thompson originally referred to the gun as a "Trench Broom" because it was intended to clean out a battlefield. They also tried the "Anti-Bandit Gun" while attempting to sell it to Police and military buyers. The nickname "Tommy Gun" stuck, and Pedigree used a slightly altered version for the name of their toy, even though he had nothing to do with gangsters.

Tommy Gunn was released in 1966 by Pedigree Toys and was only on the shelves for two short years before losing out to the far more popular Palitoy Action Man dolls. His overall design and construction were so close to Action Man that it's easy to get them mixed up. Tommy Gunn stood slightly shorter than Action Man, with an orange tone to his skin and a more angled face shape. Apart from the face being different, there are a couple of other subtle changes. His hip joint doesn't have a ball socket like Action Man, which limits how posable he is. Also, where the pelvis joins the torso on the Action Man figure, the area is curved, but for Tommy Gunn, it's on the pelvis. However, both provide the same mobility.

The short shelf life of the toy didn't stop there being plenty of outfits and accessories released for it, all based on the latest British Army equipment. Each figure came packed in a Union Jack-emblazoned box that declared he was "Battle Ready". Inside was the Tommy Gunn figure wearing a shirt, trousers, gaiters, lace-up boots, and a helmet, with later releases getting the



Above: Boxed figures in good condition sell for over £200.

Pedigree®



Sindy

Pedigree Toys was located in Exeter, England, and best known for launching the Sindy doll in 1963, with that one toy line accounting for over 80% of its overall sales. Pedigree created Sindy as a direct rival to Mattel's Barbie doll but with a more wholesome look to appeal to a wider audience.

Because of Sindy's success in the UK, the Marx Toy company tried to launch her to a US audience, but this proved unsuccessful, and she was soon dropped. Hasbro then bought the rights to Sindy and remodelled the doll to look more American, hoping this would work. But the new look didn't catch on either, resulting in Barbie's manufacturer, Mattel, filing a lawsuit against Hasbro for copyright infringement. Hasbro lost the case and was forced to redesign the doll once more. Sindy has been released and rereleased in various forms over the years and is still sought by collectors today.

extra addition of a submachine gun. Around his neck, he wore a round dog tag with GUNN T engraved on one side.

Like early Action Man, his hands are made from hard plastic and posed in such a way it makes it hard for him to hold accessories. Even getting him to hold a gun can be very tricky indeed. Tommy Gunn couldn't compete with the might of Palitoy's Action Man doll and was pulled from the shelves in 1968. Pedigree continued to use the doll design for other things, including a version of Gerry Anderson's Captain Scarlet.

Tommy Gunn returned to the shops in the 1970s when Zodiac Toys rereleased him with new accessories, including a talking version and new Space-based outfits and weapons. Although this toy was of lesser quality than the Pedigree version, it is still acceptable and the one I decided to start with for my collection. Although less widely collected than Action Man, there is still significant demand for this toy line. You can expect to pay more for him as parts and outfits get harder to come by, with some, like the British Guardsman's outfit, being particularly sought after by collectors.

It's the early versions made by Pedigree that people really want. So if you want to dip your toe into collecting Tommy Gunn toys, start by looking for the later Zodiac Toys versions because they are cheaper. ■



COZY GROVE



**SIMON BUTLER
TRIES SOMETHING
DIFFERENT WITH
SPRY FOX'S
BEAUTIFUL
AND QUAIN
COZY GROVE.**

■ Stepping way out of my gaming comfort box of platforming and hitting things, I was instantly drawn to the painterly graphical style of *Cozy Grove*, regardless of what genre it fell into. I didn't care what type of game it was, I just had to visit this wonderfully designed world and explore. My unusually rash decision paid dividends. While sitting firmly in the life sim camp, *Cosy Grove* is a beautiful place to visit. The word Cozy is so appropriate for everything in this game, and while patently inspired by *Animal Crossing*, it is the video game equivalent of a snug blanket and a warm cup of cocoa on a chilly night.

As a newly arrived Spirit Scout, you find yourself in the washed-out world of Cozy Grove, where everyone you meet is dead – not the most auspicious start to a feel-good video game, but bear with me. There was a pun there, and I'll need to lead you to it. Throughout the island, you will encounter bears. Bears who are sailors, bears who are bakers, and so on. Each of these will give you a task; this is where *Cozy Grove*'s magic steps in. Unfortunately, it can be something of a double-edged sword. The initial tasks are easily accomplished, and in doing them, the colour washes into that section of the island. The goal is to bring the colour back across all of Cozy Grove.

The tasks are doled out in tiny portions, encouraging perhaps 30-60 minutes of gameplay daily. This is where things unravel ever so slightly because if you don't return to play every 24 hours, you can lose that connection with the characters. Yes, there is a task list so that nothing can be

forgotten, but the investment can wane.

Yet if you persevere, *Cozy Grove* delivers a sweet candy kick with every visit. There are things here that pad the game out for no real reason, such as housebuilding, fishing, stone-skipping, etc., and while there are rewards for completing these tasks, they're never essential, although I enjoyed them. Sometimes it's nice to be doing something other than lopping the heads off millions of the undead,



and if you agree, this is the place to be.

The first few days of your visit are more than a little languid, but as things progress, you'll find each visit filled with tasks to complete and objects to find. With character customisation and a host of collectables to find, you'll never be stuck for something to do. The graphics are unlike anything I have seen before and are stupendous. They're hand-drawn and with a style that is quintessentially Spry Fox.

The music is relaxing, the characters and their stories are engaging, and overall it's just the ticket if, like me, you fancy wandering away from the routine game fodder into something a little zen-like. With a real-world clock, you won't be finishing this even if you sit up all night. It takes at least 100 hours to reach the "end" of the game, and more of that, I cannot say.

If you want to know what's happening with all the dead folk on Cozy Grove, you'll need to join the Spirit Scouts, jump into your little boat and sail on out there. Spry Fox's game is a worthy addition to the genre as it

accomplishes what is expected with aplomb and feels fresh and exciting. My only real complaint, if that word is even justified here, is that things can get a little repetitive. But that is the very nature of life sims. ■



SUPER STAGES

GEORGE STURGEON SCALES THE HEIGHTS OF SPORK MOUNTAIN IN 'JELLYFISH FIELDS' FROM **SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BATTLE FOR BIKINI BOTTOM: REHYDRATED**, AND TELLS US WHY THIS LEVEL SOAKS UP A SPOT AS A SUPER STAGE.

■ If you're unfamiliar with the sponge that lives in a pineapple under the sea, *SpongeBob SquarePants* is an American comedy cartoon series created by Stephen Hillenburg. It first aired on Nickelodeon in 1999. Its popularity grew rapidly following its debut season, leading to the show not only winning several awards but earning a presence in the realm of Video Games. Heavy Iron Studios developed one of the most well-known titles, *SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom*. This game garnered mixed reviews upon its original release but has since amassed a strong cult following. This positive re-appraisal earned the title enough recognition to warrant a modern remaster in 2020 by Purple Lamp Studios under the subtitle '*Rehydrated*'. Therefore, this seemed the perfect excuse to find out what all the fuss was about.



SpongeBob SquarePants **BATTLE FOR BIKINI BOTTOM** *Rehydrated*

Super Stage: Jellyfish Fields
Game: SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom, SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom: Rehydrated
System Played: Playstation 4
Year: 2003, 2020
Developer: Heavy Iron Studios, Purple Lamp Studios



Jellyfish Fields earns its place as a Super Stage for successfully translating a slice of the SpongeBob SquarePants cartoon's "early years" into an accessible and fun platforming level. Let's be honest, when it comes to movie and television tie-in games, it's either sink or swim in terms of quality, but *Battle for Bikini Bottom* blew expectations clean out of the water.

Anyone who recalls the show's earliest episodes will no doubt remember the rolling green hills and rock formations of Jellyfish Fields. It's here where Heavy Iron Studios first demonstrated their clear understanding of the source material on the PlayStation 2.

The Rehydrated remake by Purple Lamp Studios ensured this expansive location was beautifully and carefully reimaged on the PlayStation 4. With its new enhanced wide-reaching views, familiar music, and recognisable characters, it's a comprehensive dive into how to take a licensed game and pay particular attention to the finer details to deliver a simple yet fun gaming experience.

After grouchy neighbour Squidward is stung by a group of Jellyfish, the task of finding a cure falls to SpongeBob. He must now climb to the top of Spork Mountain, confront the King Jellyfish, and bring back some King Jellyfish Jelly (Oh, barnacles!).

LEVEL DESIGN

Jellyfish Fields is a large three-dimensional sandbox-style map divided into several distinct environments for the player to roam. Visually, this PS4 remake looks stunning. Its new cartoonish art direction and vibrant colours give the landscape and characters a much smoother finish than the original version (the original is still great, though).

As this is a collect-a-thon style game, only some of this luscious-looking map is available from the start, so the player must keep their eyes peeled for any collectables they find along the way. There are several items to get your hands on, such as Golden Spatulas and an abundance of Shiny Objects, which are crucial to gaining access to new parts of the stage. The eight Golden Spatulas, however, are limited in number and are the most important collectable, unlocking entirely new levels as they are accumulated. These are often stumbled upon during platforming exploits or gifted as rewards once a particular task has been completed.

The sheer volume of unusual ideas and tasks to complete is commendable. It will have the player performing anything from Bungee-Jumping (using SpongeBob's surprisingly elasticated pants) to dodging giant bouncing goggle-eyed Pufferfish. It's just a taste of the crazy gameplay variety that squeezes all the best out of this underwater world.

However, just as the player gets to grips with controlling SpongeBob, Patrick (SpongeBob's pal) suddenly becomes the star, and the player must now continue the search for Golden Spatulas using this character. This change is arguably one of the most significant contributions to the gameplay variety. Patrick possesses his own unique moves and mechanics, such as body-slamming enemies and tossing 'Throw Fruit' at switches to lower

GR8-BIT

Our GR8-BIT is simply the journey that began the moment we entered this stage. From the recognisable audio from the likes of the French Narrator to the zany antics of the rest of the **SpongeBob** cast, your senses are **bom-barded** by a fantastic nostalgic experience.



Above: Nickelodeon nostalgia and clever level design come together. Jellyfish Fields has never looked better!



Above: King Jellyfish migrates from the TV show to your video game console in a memorable Boss Battle.



gates. The player will soon discover how certain tasks on the way to Spork Mountain are better suited to a particular character's skillset, and swapping between the duo will be necessary to progress. Although this character swap was initially unexpected, it certainly keeps things fresh.

Making the journey that bit harder, the player will encounter numerous stinging Jellyfish and an army of rampaging robots roaming the stage (courtesy of the villainous Plankton's latest evil scheme). Be prepared for the unusual, as some of these Robots wield hammers shaped like joints of ham and are armed with cannons filled with Tartare

sauce. But fret not, as SpongeBob and Patrick have several methods of defence and attack: a spinning move with the bubble wand, Patrick's body slam, and an ability to throw various objects, even enemies. There is so much more to see, but to give a flavour of what else is on offer, the developer has structured an environment that will also have the players dodging molten rocks through the Lava Caves and, at times, slipping around on the ice, searching for Patrick's lost socks. Magnificent backdrops and crazy situations deliver plenty of reasons to comb these wonderful underwater wilds for secrets. There are several areas of the map to discover here, all of which have been lifted directly from the television show.

Once SpongeBob eventually reaches the top of Spork Mountain to confront the King Jellyfish (who, by the way, is taking a shower), the ensuing boss fight will offer a fun test of the rudimentary basics. Timing jumps over electrical shockwaves and attacking with SpongeBob's Bubble Wand at the right moments is vital to defeating the King Jellyfish and his summoned Jellyfish minions.

With a successful defeat and the medicine in your possession, it's time to trek back down to Squidward to claim a final Golden Spatula... I'm just kidding! There's no such backtracking here, as the nearby slide offers a far more entertaining and efficient way down. If sliding down a mountain on your tongue is your idea of fun. I often found myself sitting with my controller in hand and a stupid smile on my face. That's a sure sign that the developer has captured the essence of SpongeBob throughout the Jellyfish Fields level.

The soundtrack accompanying this stage is an original piece of Bluegrass music composed explicitly for the level. It's so well-crafted you would be forgiven for thinking this track was plucked straight from the TV series.

Jellyfish Fields is the perfect place to go for nautical nonsense. This sprawling seagrass meadow effortlessly captures the underwater escapades of the SpongeBob SquarePants television show in playable form. The developers nailed it. Hook, line, and sinker! ■

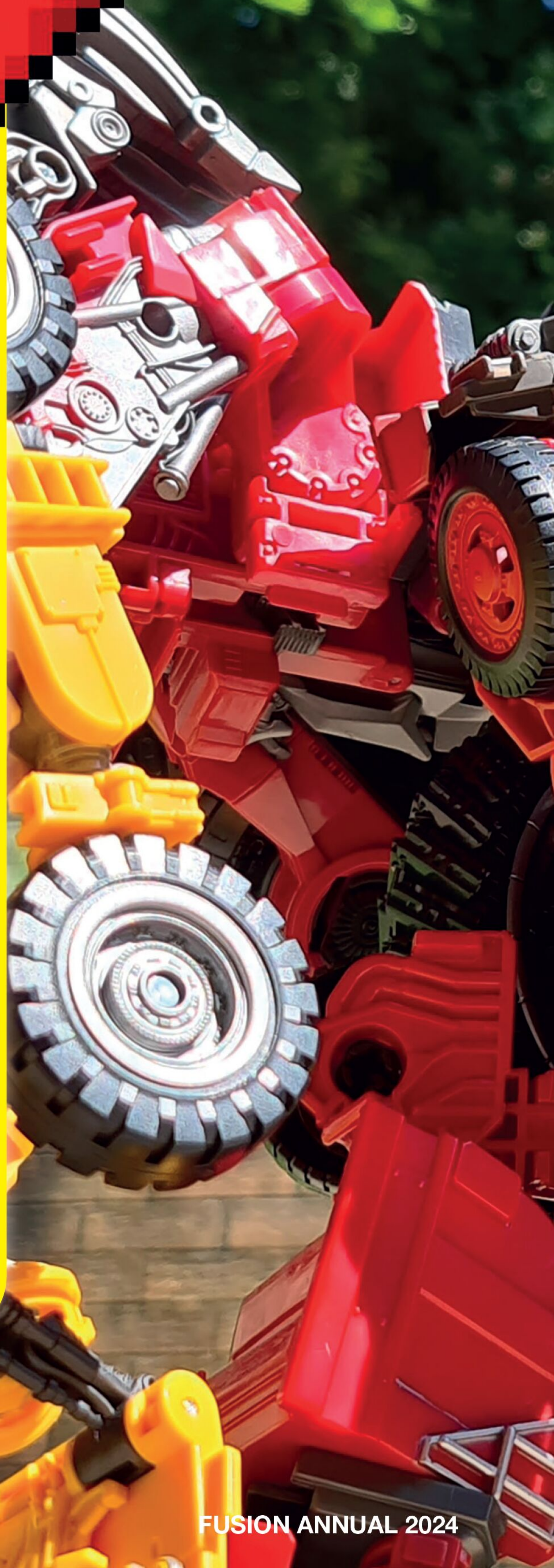
FUSION

Toy : Studio Series Devastator
Year : 2019/2020
Words : Ben Honebone

Dislike them or outright despise them, Michael Bay's Transformers movies left an indelible mark on the franchise, and in particular, the toys. In 2018, Hasbro unveiled the 'Studio Series' line of Transformers to celebrate ten years of Cybertronians on the silver screen. The new toys were based on the CG models from the films and featured greater accuracy and detail compared to the standard movie toy lines that had appeared over the previous ten years. I could rant for hours about everything wrong with 'Bayformers', but you can't deny that there have been several superb robot designs throughout the five films. One of my favourites is Devastator.

Standing around fourteen inches tall, the detail and movie accuracy of Devastator is no small feat. Each of the eight individual Constructicon figures is equally impressive, and the transformation process is complicated, taking practice to memorise and master. Despite the numerous connections and moving parts, Devastator is a surprisingly solid and sturdy toy once assembled correctly. Every limb has multiple points of articulation, and Devastator can stand unsupported if you keep gravity in mind when posing his limbs. The love and care that has gone into the design of this monstrous combiner is plain to see.

Collecting all the figures to build Devastator was a costly undertaking. I sold several items on eBay to take the sting out of the £200 required to "catch 'em all". However, I was not disappointed when I finally put them all together. I was, in fact, agog at how awesome it was! Despite being one of the worst Transformers movies, 'Revenge of The Fallen' features some of the best robot designs, and that creativity and flair are replicated in the Studio Series toy line. ■





THEN AND NOW

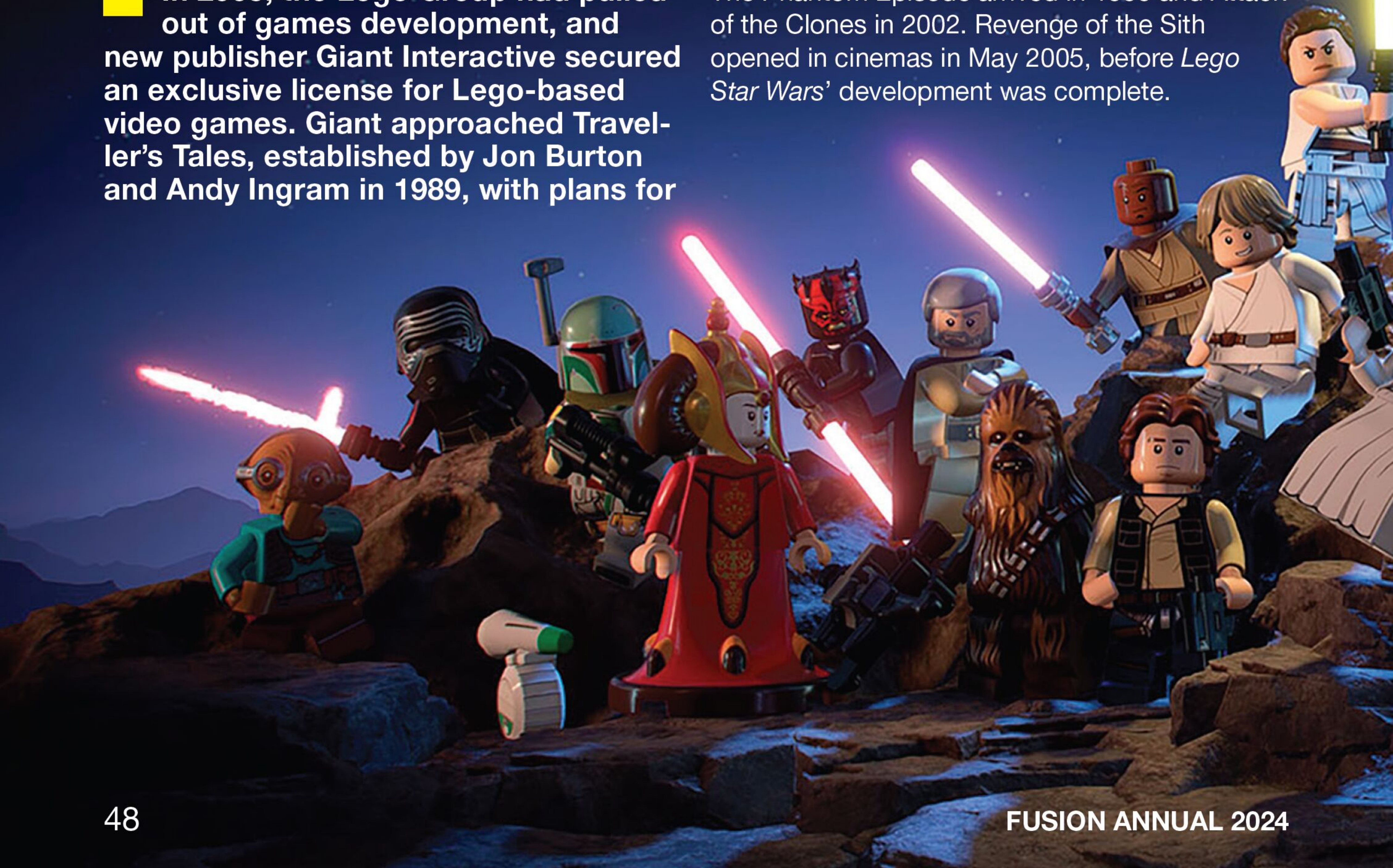


LEGO STAR WARS HAS BECOME A PHENOMENON SINCE THE LAUNCH OF THE SETS RELATING TO THE PREQUEL MOVIES AND THE TIE-IN GAMES. ANDREW FISHER LOOKS BACK AT HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED FROM THE ORIGINAL *LEGO STAR WARS* TO THE RECENT *SKYWALKER SAGA*.

■ In 2005, the Lego Group had pulled out of games development, and new publisher Giant Interactive secured an exclusive license for Lego-based video games. Giant approached Traveler's Tales, established by Jon Burton and Andy Ingram in 1989, with plans for

a *Lego Star Wars* title. In a twist, Traveler's Tales would buy out Giant, forming the new TT Games and paving the way for its long string of *Lego* titles.

The original *Lego Star Wars* was released in 2005 for PS2, GameCube, Xbox, PC, and Mac (Griptonite Games would develop a separate isometric-viewed *Lego Star Wars* for Game Boy Advance). The game was greenlit during the release of the Star Wars prequel film episodes – The Phantom Episode arrived in 1999 and Attack of the Clones in 2002. Revenge of the Sith opened in cinemas in May 2005, before *Lego Star Wars*' development was complete.





Above: Dexter's Diner is the hub in *Lego Star Wars*, with doors leading to the episodes.

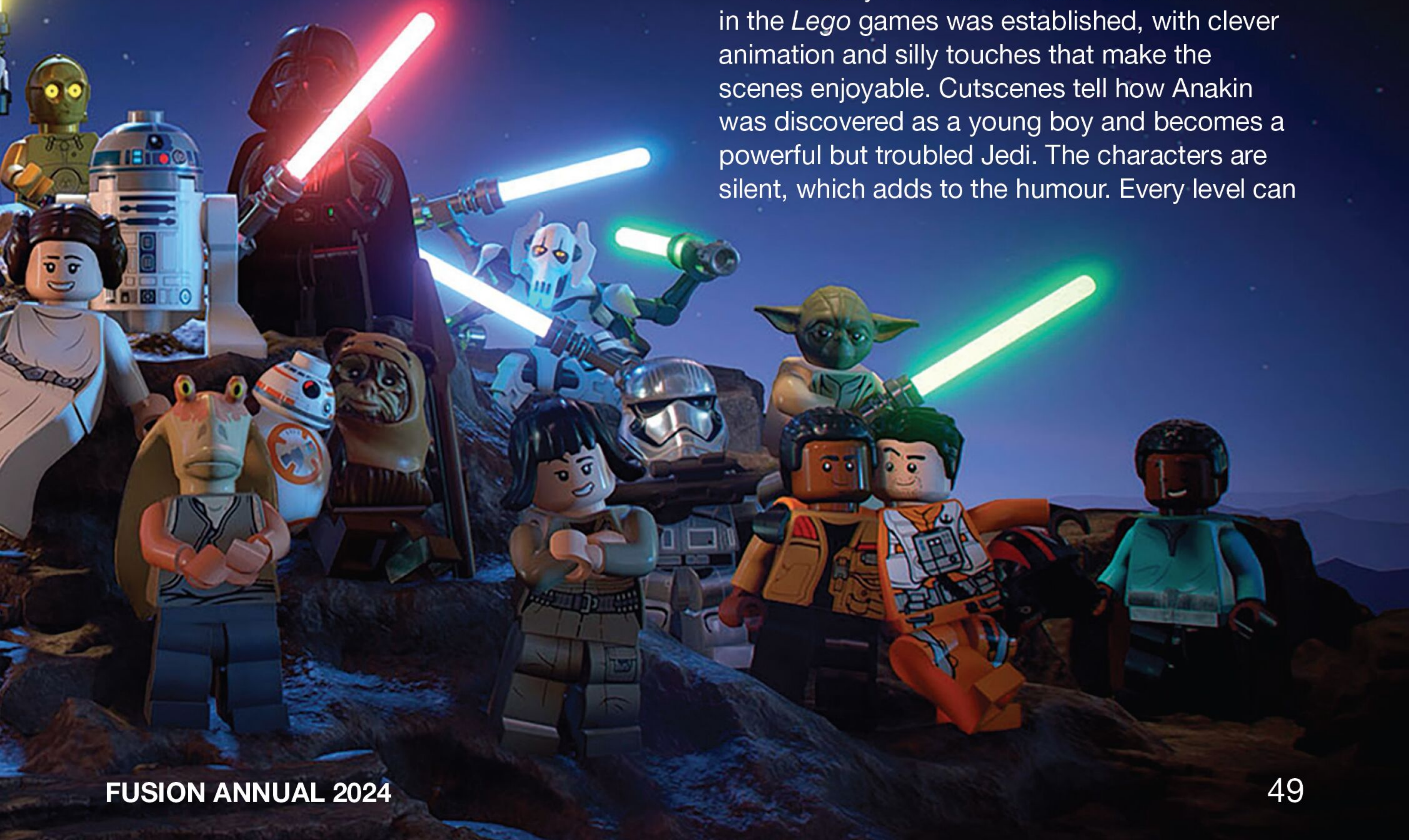


In Story Mode, a solo player has two characters to switch between, or two players can work together with cooperative play allowing you to drop in and out as you like. Destroying enemies and scenery rewards the player with different coloured Lego Studs, which function as the game's currency. Each level challenges you to reach 'True Jedi' status by earning enough Studs to fill the Stud bar at the top of the screen. Dying or falling off the scenery costs the player a few Studs, but it is not a harsh penalty. Jedi can wield lightsabres and use the power of the Force to rebuild objects, including vital switches and ladders

to unlock new areas.

Dexter's Diner serves as a game hub, giving access to 18 Story levels covering the three films that are gradually unlocked. Additional characters appear in the diner and can be unlocked through completing Story Mode levels, then purchased for Studs. Outside the Diner, the Minikit vehicles gradually build up as the player gathers Kits.

The story is where the tradition of humour in the *Lego* games was established, with clever animation and silly touches that make the scenes enjoyable. Cutscenes tell how Anakin was discovered as a young boy and becomes a powerful but troubled Jedi. The characters are silent, which adds to the humour. Every level can



Top Right: Vehicle levels add a variety of gameplay to *Lego Star Wars*. **Below:** Throughout the series, learning to use a lightsaber to deflect incoming shots is vital. **Bottom Right:** Blaster characters can grapple onto certain points to climb or pull something.



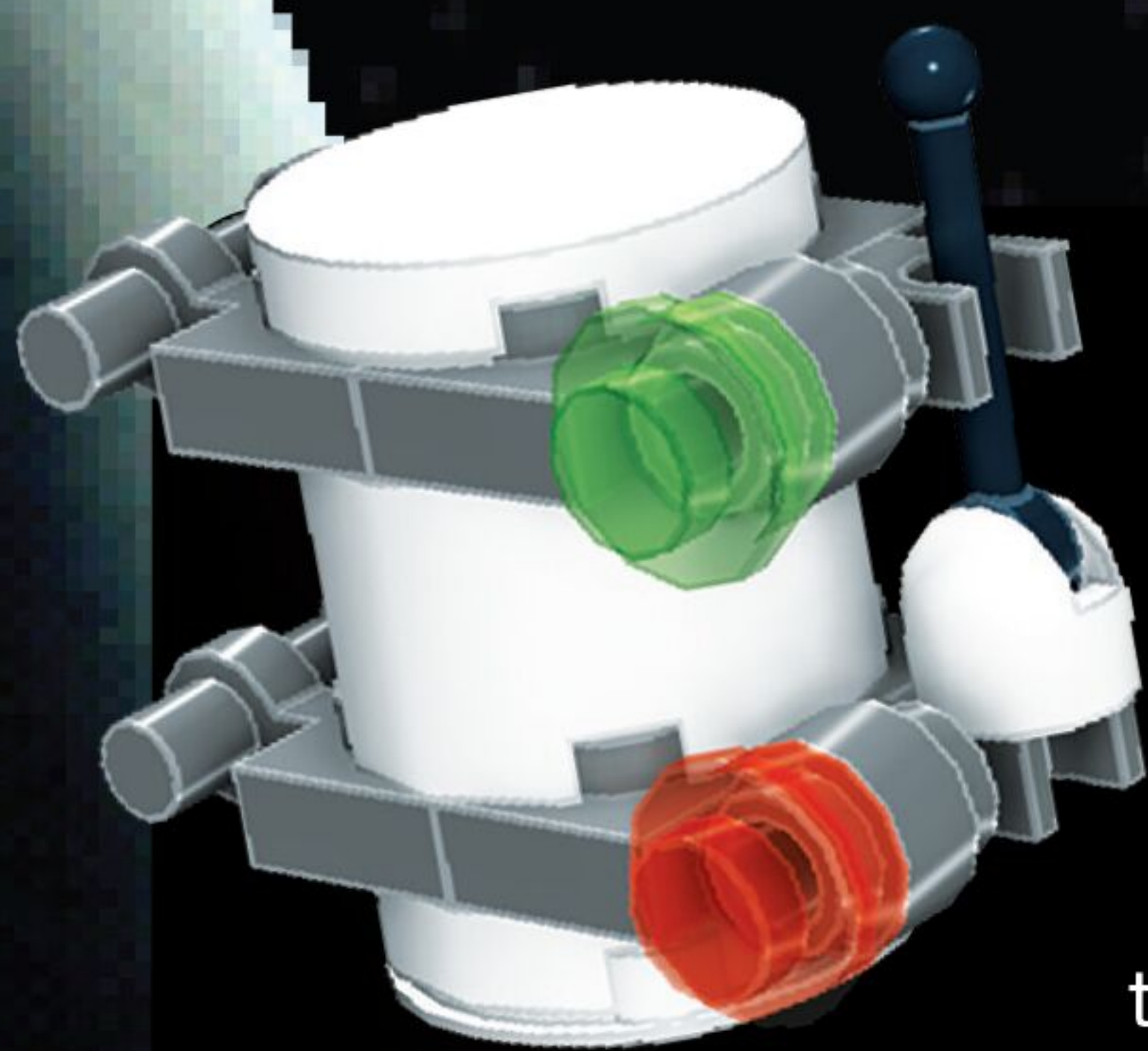
then be replayed in Free Play mode, allowing the player to select which characters to take with them based on those unlocked/purchased. This mode allows the player to hunt out hidden areas for Minkits. Adding variety to the action are three vehicle sections, one for each film. Anakin must repair and race his Podracer. Gunship Cavalry sees the player taking out Separatist forces on Genosia. And finally, Obi-Wan and an older Anakin fight in the Battle over Coruscant.

The game was well received across all formats, particularly for its child-friendly cooperative play. But players desperately wanted to see the original Star Wars trilogy remade in Lego form, and it would finally happen with *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*. All six films were then given a new collection of shiny Lego pieces as 2007's *Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga*.

Traveller's Tales would apply its established format to other successful franchises. Indiana Jones, Harry Potter, The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings, Batman, and Marvel all got their *Lego* incarnations. And Hollywood would come calling with The Lego Movie, which also received a video game adaptation. Traveller's Tales looked to Lego for even more inspiration in the form of *Lego City Undercover* (originally a Wii U exclusive), a broader open-world game with hints of *Grand Theft Auto*. A key addition to



these later games was the Red Bricks. These bonus bricks were hard to find, often requiring the use of multiple characters in Free Play to access, and could then be activated from the Pause menu. The most significant benefit was the Score Multiplier – which could be “stacked” together, allowing the player to reach True Jedi status easily. Other *Lego* games featured silly costumes, audio effects (such as the 8-bit chiptune in *Lord of the Rings*), and other bonuses. For collectors, the special editions (often available as a pre-order from select retailers) that included a unique Lego figure are worth tracking down.



SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

The Minikit has been a constant feature of the *Lego* games since the original *Lego Star Wars*. Each level of the game has five (originally ten) white cylinders, either visible or hidden off the main path, that look like they are made of Lego bricks. Collecting them in Story or Free Play mode adds to your tally, and collecting all the Minikits in a level offers the chance to buy the completed kit. These are then placed in a gallery that can be viewed.

The Skywalker Saga ups the ante because each collectable kit made from Minikits can be assembled to create a vehicle the player can control in the space sequences. These include massive Capital Ships, familiar vehicles such as X-Wings, and hilarious miniature versions of classic ships (such as Boba Fett's Slave One). Selecting a ship from the Holoprojector sees the current vessel in control fly out of shot, and the new vehicle arrives. Tip – check out the A-Wing for its destructive power.



Above: C3PO just found a Minikit on the first level.

However, there was unfinished business in the Star Wars galaxy far, far away. *Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars* drew on material from the animated series, and *The Force Awakens* would also receive its own standalone *Lego* game. But, with the main film series reaching nine releases and becoming known as The Skywalker Saga, Traveller's Tales began a four-year development cycle to bring all nine films back to our screens in video game form.

Lego Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga appeared for PC, Switch, Xbox One and PS4 in 2021. The title had suffered from delays and concerns about “crunch” by the teams working

on the game. But the release was still a triumph across multiple formats, with the later appearance on Game Pass generating even more players. A series of DLC content added extra characters, including those from *The Mandalorian* and *Bad Batch* TV shows.

At the start of *The Skywalker Saga*, the player enters Story Mode with the first chapter of each trilogy available – *The Phantom Menace*, *A New Hope*, and *The Force Awakens*. Once each of these chapters has been completed, the other films in that trilogy become available. As before, the game can be played in Story Mode, following the story of each movie with funny cutscenes,

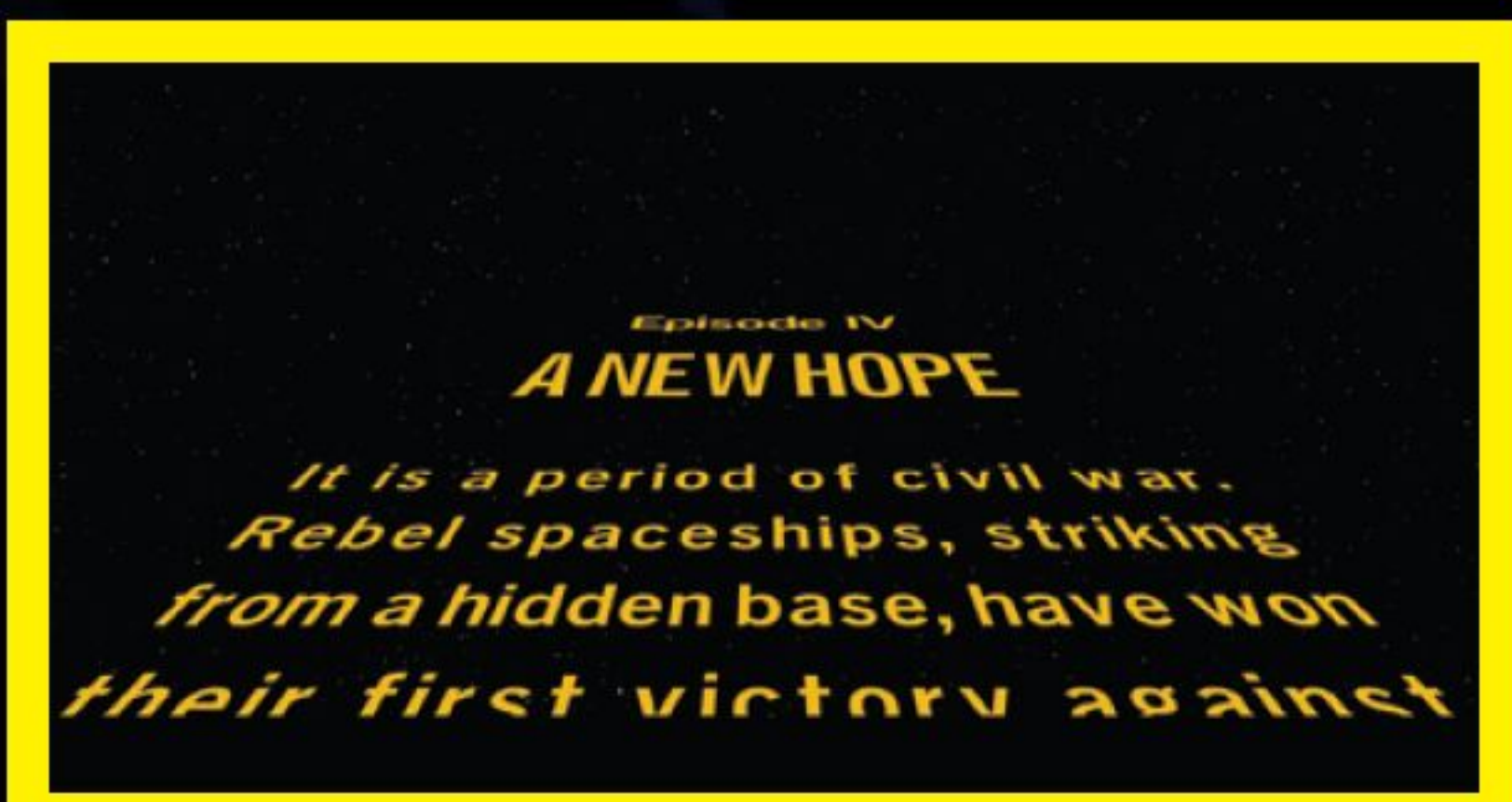
and later in Free Play to collect the remaining Minikits and unlock other bonus quests. However, the game has a much grander open-world structure than earlier games, inherited from the standalone game *Lego: The Force Awakens*.

The Galaxy map is split into eighteen Sectors, each featuring a Planet and the surrounding Space. Side Missions and other opportunities appear in the Space sectors: destroying a passing Comet for Studs or a Kyber Brick, meeting a character to carry out a Smuggling request, or taking sides in an ongoing Space Battle. Smuggling requires you to transport something or someone to another Sector, with the threat of Imperial forces or Bounty Hunters trying to stop you. One of my favourite Side Missions sees the player shipping medals to Yavin 4 – because there were complaints that a certain Wookiee missed out on a medal last time. There are also Capital Ships that warp into a Sector. Most require damaging the ship enough to destroy it (while also tackling the craft it launches). There are also eight Capital Ships that can be boarded, with extra Side Missions

and bonuses hidden within once the player has taken control of the ship (usually by defeating the enemy character in charge).

Down on the Planets, non-player characters offer all sorts of Side Missions as you travel around a location – and most Planets have more than one area to explore. Special “circles” show the Story Mode levels, which you can re-enter to improve your Stud count. Most of all, using the Hologrator (by pressing Start) is essential to see what else is in the area. The player can select a destination/Side Mission, and the mini-map then points the player to that spot. Extra characters are unlocked by completing objectives within a Mission, then purchased from the Hologrator; many have alternative costumes/designs, giving over 150 to discover. Melee combat is more intricate, requiring combos of buttons and timing, while classic lightsaber fighting is there, too. Characters with blasters can take cover and lean out to target opponents or targets.

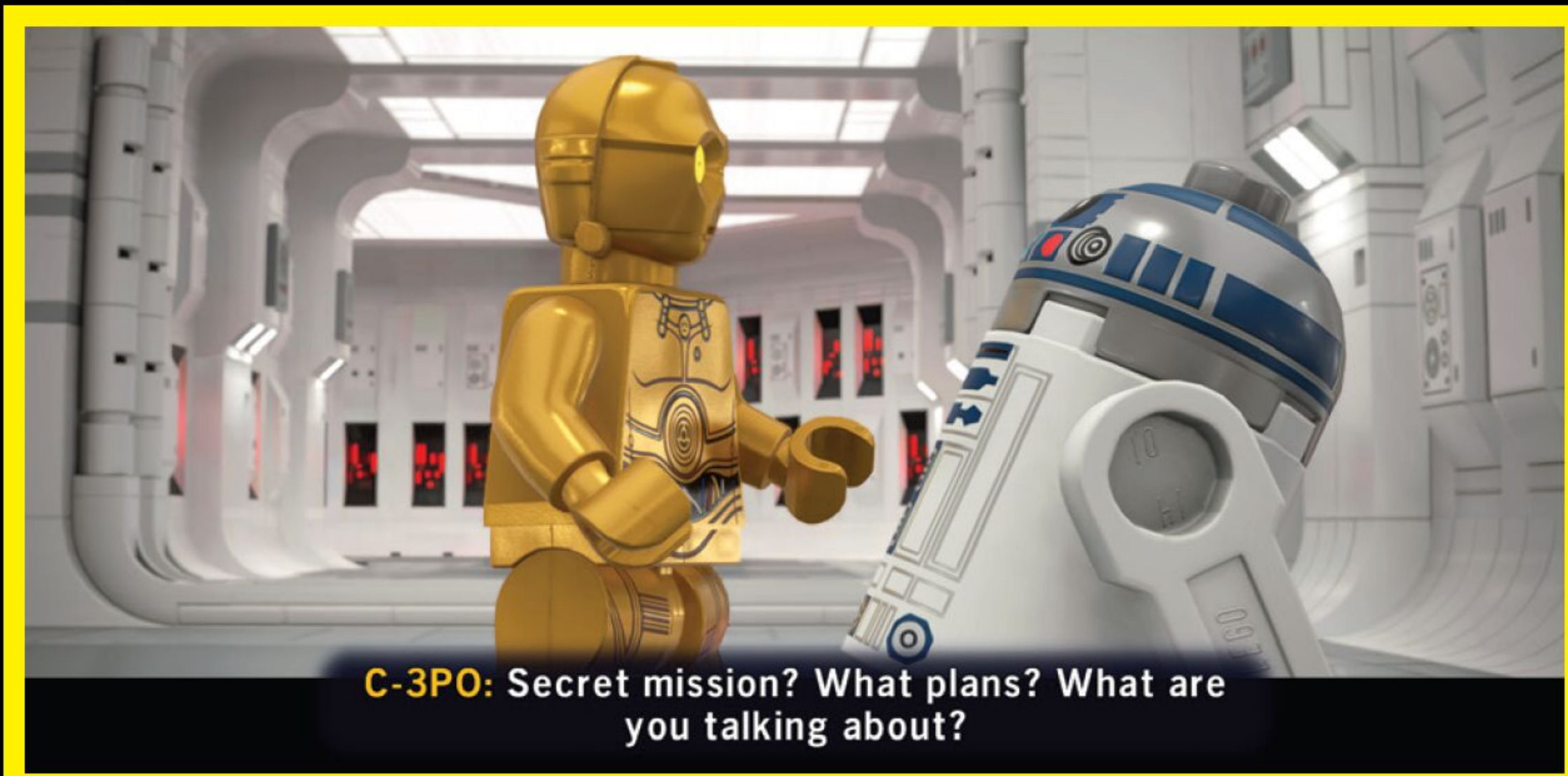
Completing missions and side missions will award the player blue, transparent Kyber Bricks.



Above: Each episode opens with the familiar movie scroll in the correct colour.

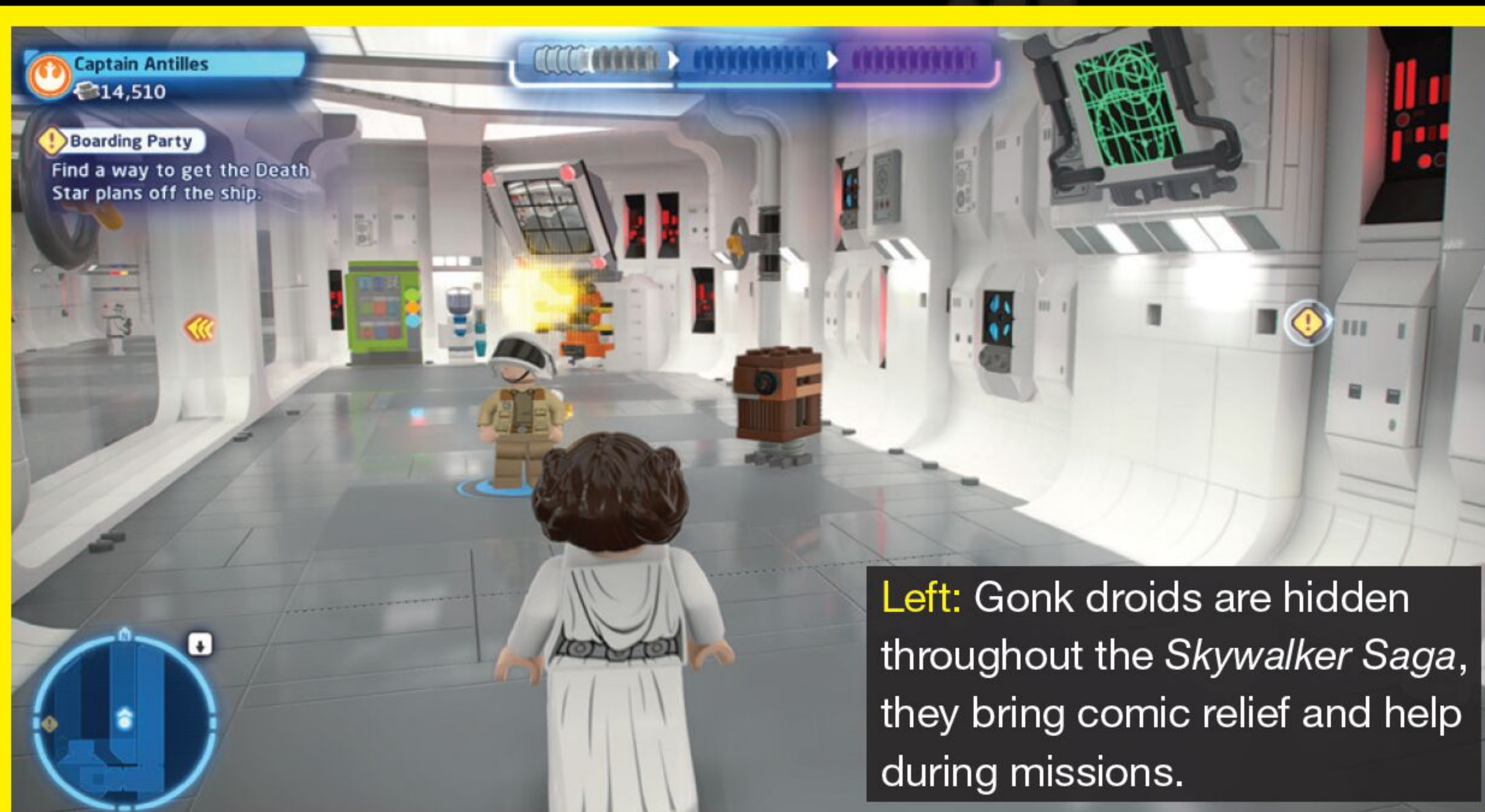
Below: Familiar moments are given the humorous cutscene treatment.

Bottom Right: Opening all the sectors of the Galactic Map will take some time.





Kylo Ren: I will let nothing stand in our way.



Left: Gonk droids are hidden throughout the *Skywalker Saga*, they bring comic relief and help during missions.

There are up to six per Story Level, including three Kyber Bricks for reaching True Jedi status. These replace the Red Brick, with 1200 of them to collect. These are then used to purchase characters and Ships and unlock the Bonus Multipliers and other bonus features. But to get them, you need a Datacard. Each Sector has a Datacard hidden somewhere, which can be pinpointed on the mini-map. Datacards enable the Score Multipliers and other amusing effects – such as Disco mode, Mumble mode (which turns off the voice acting), and more.

The game's open-world structure can seem overwhelming, especially with the nine films to get through in Story Mode. Travelling backwards and forwards between different Planets and Sectors can be time-consuming. However, the humorous moments and sheer variety of Mission

types mean you are constantly doing something new – from manipulating machinery to helping a Wompa escape from the Hoth base. Famous scenes have been reinterpreted, allowing Luke to take down AT-ATs in his snow speeder or help Lando and the Rebels escape Cloud City. Completing the Story Mode offers over 25 hours of gameplay, and unlocking everything to 100% will require up to 80 hours (with a unique hidden ceremony on Yavin 4 should you reach that landmark).

The game looks outstanding in HD, retaining the classic Lego look of its characters and vehicles. It's a *Lego* game that features voice acting throughout, which can be divisive for fans, but the subtitles help. Once again, the cutscenes live up to expectations, with Han Solo's "I know" and his recovery from being frozen particularly funny. The musical score is superb, recreating the classic Jon Williams themes well.

The Skywalker Saga is the ultimate Lego video game released to date, massive in scope and highly playable – especially in co-op mode. Traveller's Tales captured the grandeur and scale of the nine films, adding its trademark humour and inventive gameplay. ■

OBSERVATION

GRAEME MASON OPENS THE POD BAY DOORS ON NO CODE'S SCI-FI THRILLER, *OBSERVATION*.

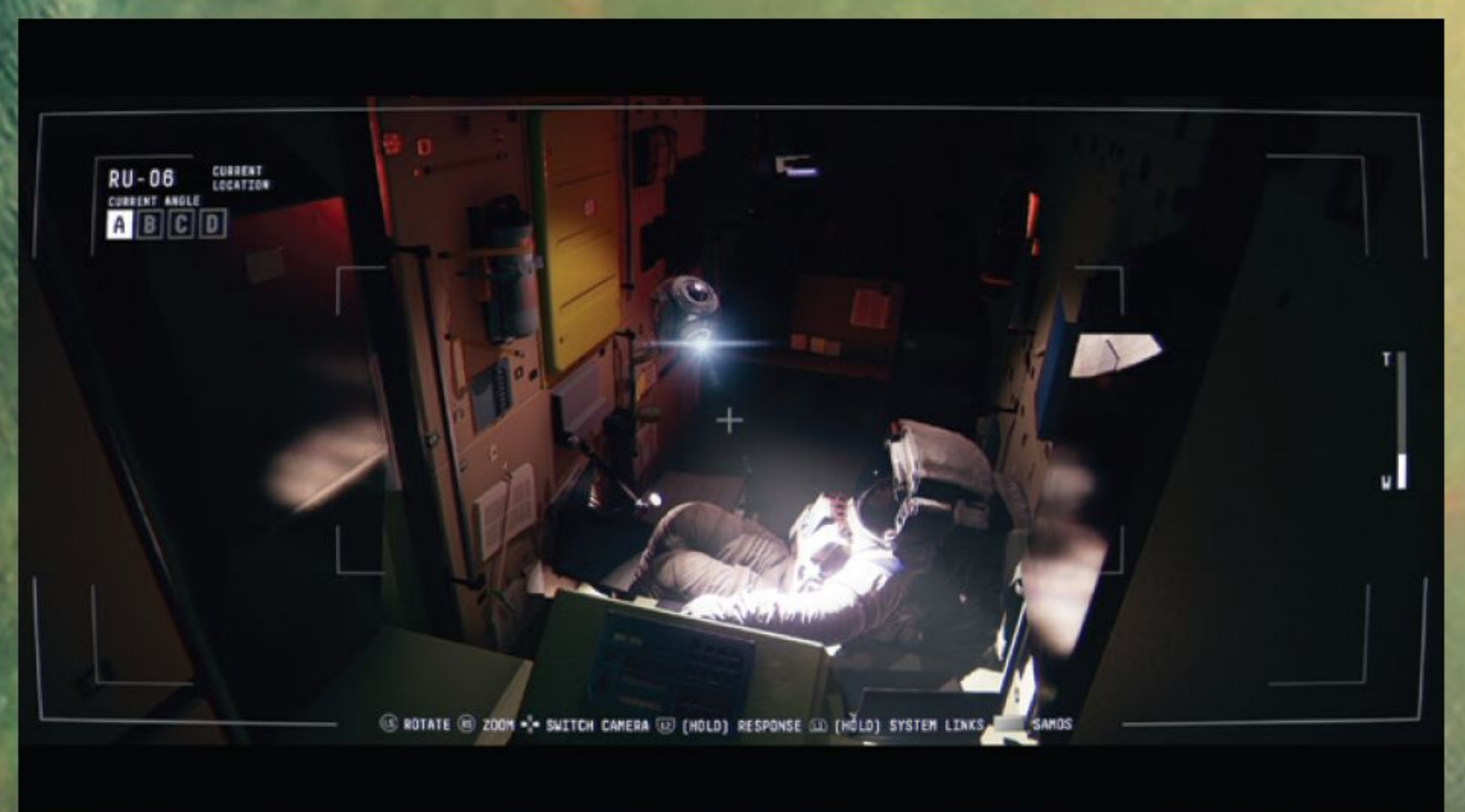
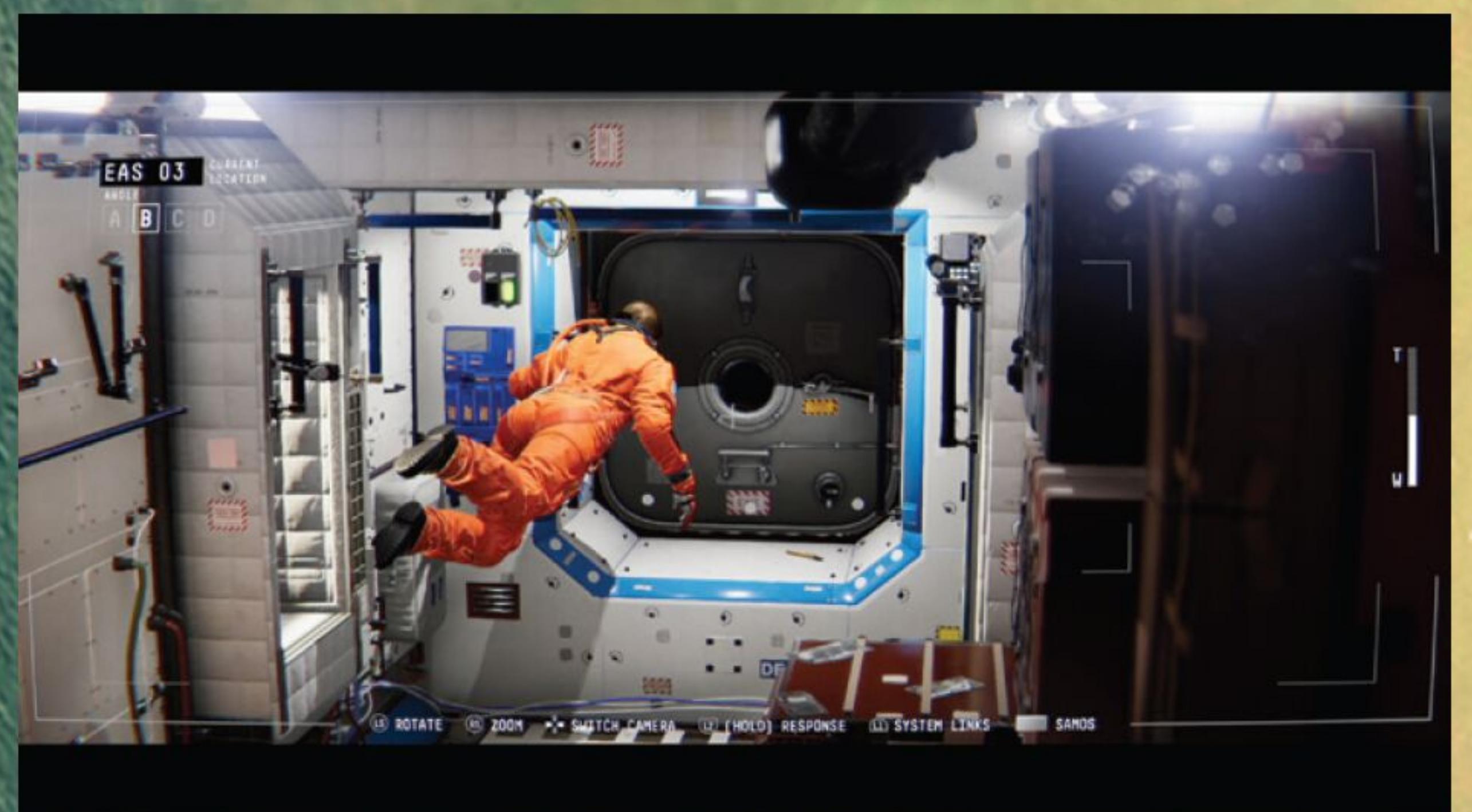
This clever sci-fi game challenges a few aspects of the genre and presents a unique and immersive style. The player is Systems Administration and Maintenance, SAM, the integrated AI of the eponymous multi-national space station. Something very bad has happened, and the facility is spinning out of control. The apparent lone human survivor, Dr. Emma Fisher, battles to restore the stricken systems and investigate the location of her colleagues while trying to figure out why the station has suddenly appeared over the planet of Saturn.

Set aboard the claustrophobic confines and exterior of the space station, SAM can manipulate hatches, safety systems, and other devices, often via the many cameras dotted around each location. Problems such as module fires frequently occur, and each of these is solved by activating or directing the relevant control features. All the while, SAM is encountering visions, suggesting this AI – the player – may be under the influence of some unknown alien force.

While it can be a bit frustrating at times, given that SAM normally has no direct physical control over events, *Observation* is an intriguing game that forces the player to think differently about how to solve its problems. Personally, as a fan of classic sci-fi, the themes of technology-gone-wrong and an advanced alien race, evocative of the renowned 1968 movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* and 1997's *Event Horizon*, hugely endeared me to this game, as did its sleek and lean running time. If that sounds like your thing, this odd, fascinating and original title could be for you, too. ■



V A T I O N



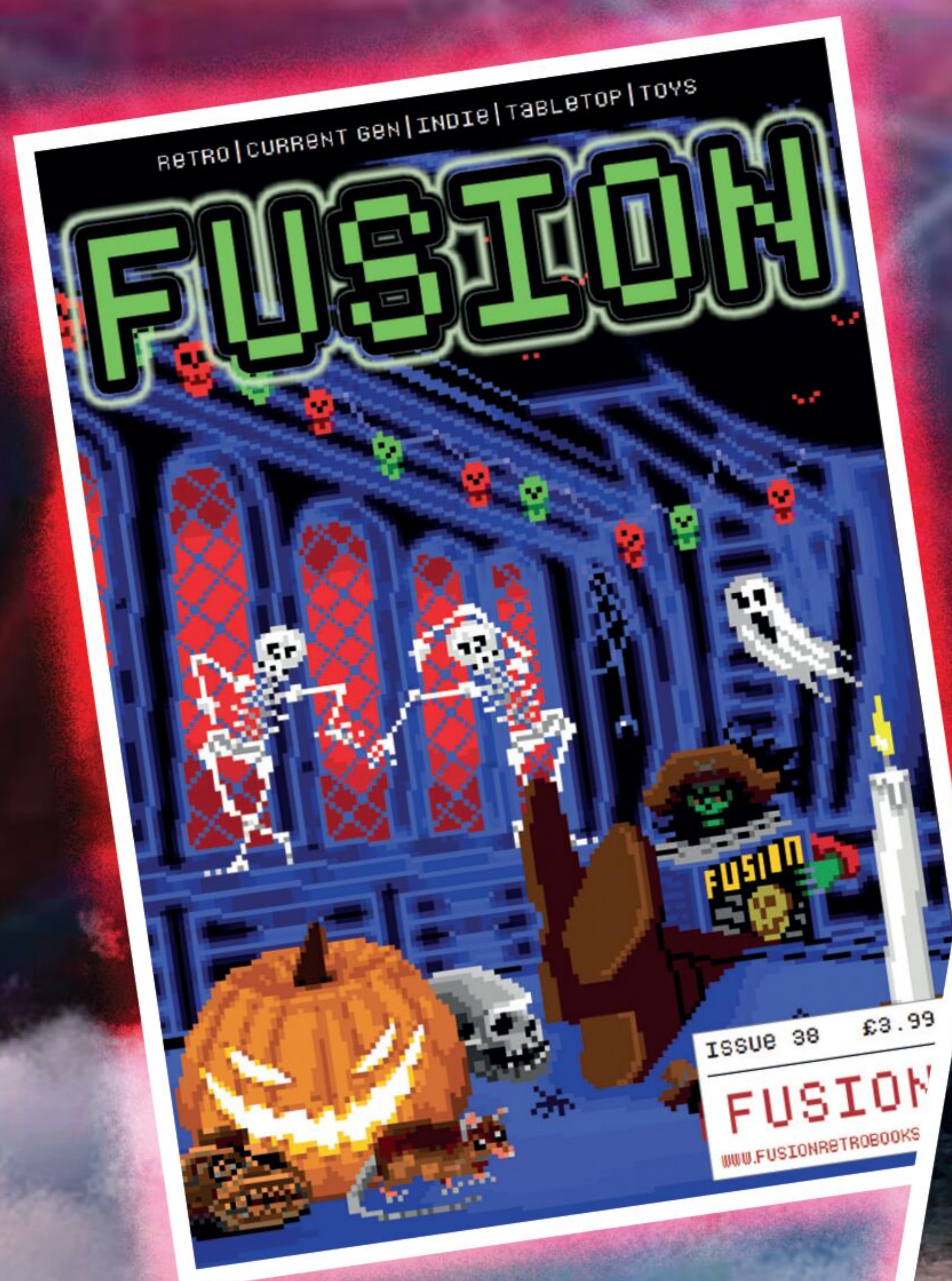


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FUSION



TCR

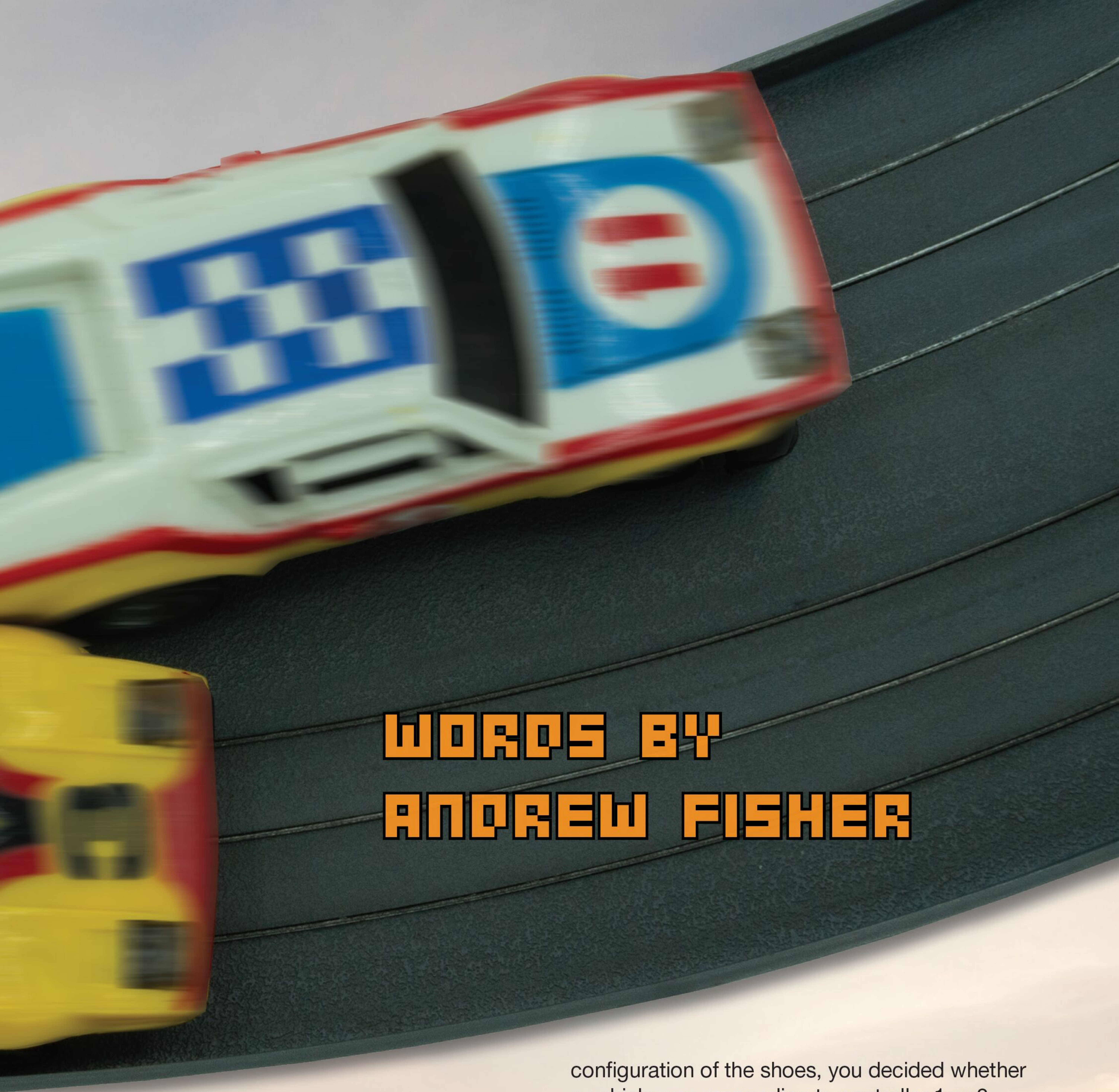
TOTAL CONTROL RACING



WHEN MOST PEOPLE THINK OF SLOT CAR RACING, THEY WILL REMEMBER THE BRAND LEADER SCALEXTRIC. BUT RIVAL TCR (TOTAL CONTROL RACING) WAS SLOTLESS AND OFFERED UNIQUE FEATURES.

■ I remember my older brother coming home from a school jumble sale with a TCR set. It was the Truck Racing set, with one red truck and one white truck. It had cost him £10 in

pocket money, a bargain at a time when the base sets were selling for around £60. In general, TCR was cheaper than Scalextric but was still quite an expensive toy. I remember multiple trips to my local Toymaster shop in Cambridge, where I would look at the shelves of extra tracks and vehicles available. My brother and I bought jeeps to race but never expanded the track. Eventually, it was thrown away because the transformer stopped working, which is a real shame.



WORDS BY ANDREW FISHER

The original sets were released in the 1970s, but in May 1980, The Ideal Toy Corporation filed a patent application that was granted in October 1981 for a “toy miniature vehicle racing game.” The sixteen claims and five figures of the application show what is different from similar toys – the vehicles can switch between the inner and outer lanes of the track, and the player can race against a “drone” vehicle.

The plastic track had raised edges to keep the vehicles from sliding off completely, and power was supplied to the vehicles via three metal strips. Under the cars were two brass connectors, or “shoes.” By changing the

configuration of the shoes, you decided whether a vehicle was responding to controller 1 or 2. A switch on the back of the controller could be moved up and down to switch lanes; this was best attempted on straight sections of the track. Initially, the switch reversed the motor direction, meaning the rear wheels pushed the car over. Later, the reversal of current triggered the steering at the front of the vehicle. By setting the shoes to the “Jam car” configuration, the vehicle became a drone that drove at a constant pace. The initial set supported up to four vehicles on track, two player-controlled and two jam cars, shaped to resemble Formula 1 race cars.

As with Scalextric, the players could build their own layouts using sections of track. The initial set only had 15-inch straights and



90-degree bends, but the range was expanded with shorter 10-inch straights and 45-degree turns. Most sets had a start/finish straight with a chequerboard flag pattern printed onto the piece. More exotic parts included the 4-track crossover section for creating a pitlane or wider track, a ramp and jump from the Dukes of Hazzard licensed set, and banked corners to resemble an American oval track. A Lap Counter could be added over the track, and the Speed Equalizer allowed you to match the performance of different cars with a slider that changed the voltages. Other accessories included track-side advertising boards and even a miniature grandstand.

There were problems. Early sets had major safety issues concerning the voltage from the power supply. And the cars themselves were difficult to maintain. The soft brass of the “shoes” wore away quickly, and the wheels and motor were prone to clogging up with dirt and fluff. Vehicles would “wear in” and slow down

at different rates, and racing could be uneven. Overtaking, even with the lane-switching, was hard to achieve if both racers were at full power. Although it was possible to slide and drift from taking a corner too fast, the raised edges meant fewer spills and thrills.

The range was increased with multiple base sets and extra vehicles, with the more exotic cars featuring lights. The range included the Dukes of Hazzard playset with replicas of the General Lee and Boss Hogg’s car (there are two versions of this latter car, distinguished by the black bonnet) and KITT from Knight Rider. Germany, France, and Italy got their own TCR ranges with local vehicles, and Brazilian toy company TROL Industrias Plasticas S.A. licensed and manufactured TCR in that country. Unfortunately, TCR could never out-pace its rival, Scalextric, although many have fond memories of this alternative racing system. ■





THE IDEAL TOY

Morris and Rose Witchum founded the Ideal Toy and Novelty Company in 1903 when they invented the Teddy bear (named after Theodore Roosevelt). The company was renamed The Ideal Toy Company in 1907. Its first real boom was post-World War II with its plastic dolls, and a second pivotal phase was bringing the Rubik's Cube to market, taking out multiple lawsuits to protect its product. With a takeover by CBS Toys in 1982, Ideal would become part of the Viewmaster group in 1987. Tyco took over what remained of the company and the TCR line in 1989, continuing to sell the sets well into the 1990s. Then, when Tyco merged with Mattel in 1997, its assets (including Kerplunk and Mouse Trap) were sold to Hasbro.



MILITARY SIMS

WORDS BY
ANDREW OYSTON

What turned out to be the tail end of the Cold War saw military simulations become a major genre on the PC. As 16-bit consoles wormed their way into homes in the 1990s, publishers saw the opportunity to target the “mil-sim” fans who weren’t yet part of the PC world. Not surprisingly, Sega’s Mega Drive saw more than a few of them.

Before we begin, let’s define what a “mil-sim” is. Each of these titles has to use a real-world military vehicle, even if it never actually entered service, and take place within said vehicle. So, no side-scrolling (sorry, *Gunship*) or isometric views (that’s the *Strike* series done for).

F-15 Strike Eagle II

A personal favourite in its Amiga guise (I still have the maps somewhere). This port does a valiant job of converting a joystick and keyboard combo to the Mega Drive’s three-button pad. However, relegating external views selection to the pause menu takes you out of the action when

you’re trying to see cool stuff happening, and the controls feel sluggish but not game-breaking.

You tackle missions in one of six theatres: Libya, the Persian Gulf, Vietnam, the Middle East, Nordkapp (Northern Scandinavia), and Central Europe. You must destroy all primary and secondary targets and anything else that gets in your way before making a dubious attempt at landing. There’s not much depth here, but the in-game graphics are colourful and move at a decent pace. Sound effects are respectable, and the title music tries to ape *Top Gun*, albeit poorly. For some reason, a different, more jaunty and intensely annoying tune plays throughout your flights. Still, with four difficulty levels, this is a good effort all around, and it does more than enough to warrant some of your spare time.



Above: “Migsing” it up with the enemy - I’ll get my coat (*F-15 SE II*).



Above: My 200M fighter is about to get shot down (*F-22 I*).



Above: It plays almost as boringly as it looks (*MiG-29 FP*).

F-117 Night Storm

F-117 *Night Storm* hands you the eponymous Stealth Fighter and adds laser-guided bombs to your armoury. It proves a challenge to master when controlling your fighter and lasing your target. Missiles are still available, but the weapon variety is a nice change. Arcade and campaign modes add choice to the mix, and there is quite the challenge here, with thirty missions available in the latter. It's not the best looking sim, nor the most fluid, but the sampled speech adds to the presentation, and it's enjoyable enough once you get past the po-faced music.

F-22 Interceptor

EA aims for another stealth platform in *F-22 Interceptor*, but this time it's more of a simplified experience. You'll strike blows for freedom over four campaigns (and a training suite) and kill the Ace pilots that

dominate each region. It's not exactly realistic in its weapons choice; a TOW anti-tank missile on an F-22? You'll find yourself using the weapons selection screen and the options menu far too much, breaking up the pace of each mission. The controls are finicky too, and although it moves well, the graphics are a little garish, and the music needs to calm down.

MiG-29 Fighter Pilot

MiG-29 *Fighter Pilot* rounds off the fixed-wing flyers and is a case of cramming too much into a console game. You'll need to deal with wheel brakes and landing gear (something other titles handle automatically), as well as weapons and waypoints. It's an admirable attempt at a semi-serious flight sim, and there is some novelty in terminating targets with Soviet-era weaponry. But the graphics and sound are sparse, and much like central Siberia, it's all a little drab. The five missions will tax you if you put the effort in, but fun seekers will give up long before then due to the awkward controls.



Above: A slideshow in brown (*Steel Talons*).

Steel Talons

It's time to "Get to the Choppers", with two titles vying for your attention. *Steel Talons* gives you an Apache gunship and lots of targets, with the aim of killing everything within a set time of either 'pass' or 'ace'. Oh, and there is points scoring, too. It still puts you in the cockpit, so it warrants inclusion here, but it's too much of an arcade title for serious (non-PC owning) mil-sim fans. It also has other issues - the graphics are slideshow-like at times, the music sounds like it belongs on an NFL pitch, and your engine sounds more like a diesel truck than a multi-million dollar turbine. The sampled speech is merely a novelty cherry on top.

LHX Attack Chopper

LHX Attack Chopper descends from a PC sim, and handles like one. It offers extra control options, such as target selection if you have a second pad. Ah, the sheer middle-class luxury of a second controller. Like *F-15 Strike Eagle II*, *LHX* has a simple "take off, kill this, and land" concept, but it works well and can be quite challenging. Missions are randomised to a degree, and you'll need to play through a lot to progress through the various theatres of operation. You



Above: Attack the mutant camel! (*LHX AC*).

may find repetition kicking in, even if it moves well and sounds good, but this will be a surprising time-sink for some.

Garry Kitchen's Super Battletank

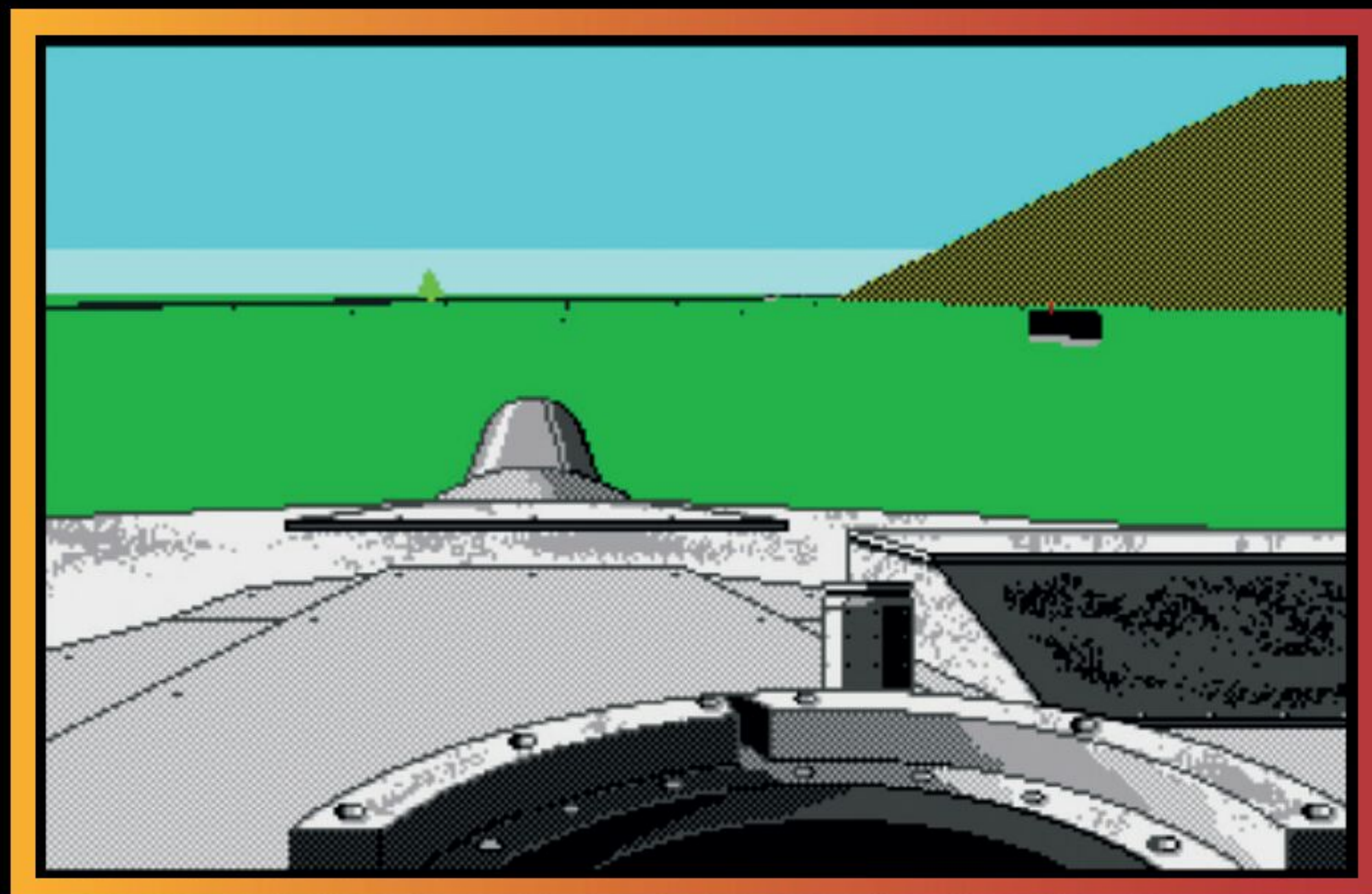
A brace of tank games next, and, as with the Whirlybirds, there's one arcade title and one serious sim. Garry Kitchen's *Super Battletank* is a confusing mix. You spin Garry's M1A1 (super battle) tank around Kuwait in early 1991, blowing up enemy vehicles and avoiding minefields. One viewpoint is available, which is letterboxed to ensure what you do see moves smoothly. The audio veers from weird synth sound effects to an off-key rendition of Ride of the Valkyries. The ten missions are enough to fill an afternoon, but the actual combat doesn't engage the player. More Garry Kitchen's *Distinctly Average Battletank*, the juxtaposition of real-world history and basic gameplay that even Atari's *Battlezone* bettered years before make this a weekend rental at best before Garry asks for his tank back.

M1 Abrams Battle Tank

M1 Abrams Battle Tank places you in one of the four crew positions in an M1 Abrams tank in the late 1980s, as the Cold War has suddenly warmed up. Over eight missions, you'll tackle the best the Soviet Army can throw at you and save West Germany in the process. Graphically, it looks like an early DOS game because that's precisely what it is. Frame rate varies depending on what's happening on-screen, and aside from a taste of Holst's Mars on the title screen, it's basic sound effects only during play. Once you've completed the missions, there are three difficulty levels and the ability to choose day or night engagements to offer some depth. *M1 Abrams Battle Tank* was the "other" game I received with my Mega Drive that long ago Christmas (*Altered Beast* being the pack-in title), and it's as clear a favourite now as it was back then. I still have the muscle memory for the menu options, too.

688 Attack Sub

To the depths now with our final, and only, naval inclusion. Praised for its VGA graphics upon release, when such luxuries cost PC owners hundreds extra, *688 Attack Sub* gives you command of a Los Angeles-class nuclear



Above: A countryside drive, the 125mm Sabot rounds whistling through your hair. (*M1 ABT*).

attack sub (hull number 688, hence the title). Over nine missions, you'll spend a lot of time looking at situation maps and control panels. The periscope view, whilst pretty, will get you killed if you use it too much, and you'll need to read the 43-page manual to get an idea of how things actually work, but this merely adds to the depth [sigh - Ed] of gameplay. Just go careful with the active sonar, "One ping, Vasily, one ping only".

Six more missions are playable as a Soviet Alfa-class sub and one as the USS Dallas, a Los Angeles-class sub made famous in the film, *The Hunt For Red October*. There is enough here to keep you playing for hours, and although not 100% realistic, this was the best you could get on the Mega Drive. The controls, designed originally for mouse and keyboard, have been adapted well, and the lack of music is offset by plenty of sampled speech. In my opinion, this is the best console sub-sim ever.

Military simulations on consoles have always faced the twin hurdles of control input and technical capabilities. The Mega Drive's 68000 processor helped when it came to equalling Amiga titles, and some forethought made the control issue easier to handle in most cases. Truthfully, mil-sim fans were better off with a VGA-equipped 286 PC or better, but as we have seen, console players could also join in the fun even with the handicaps noted above. With the nine titles here, you could at least gain an appreciation of the genre, and some, like *M1 Abrams* and *688 Attack Sub*, were admirably close to the PC originals. ■



Above: It might look pretty, but now you are dead (*688 AS*).

YOU ARE NOW ENTERING
Vice City

grand theft auto

vice city

me TV

MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT TV

all about me

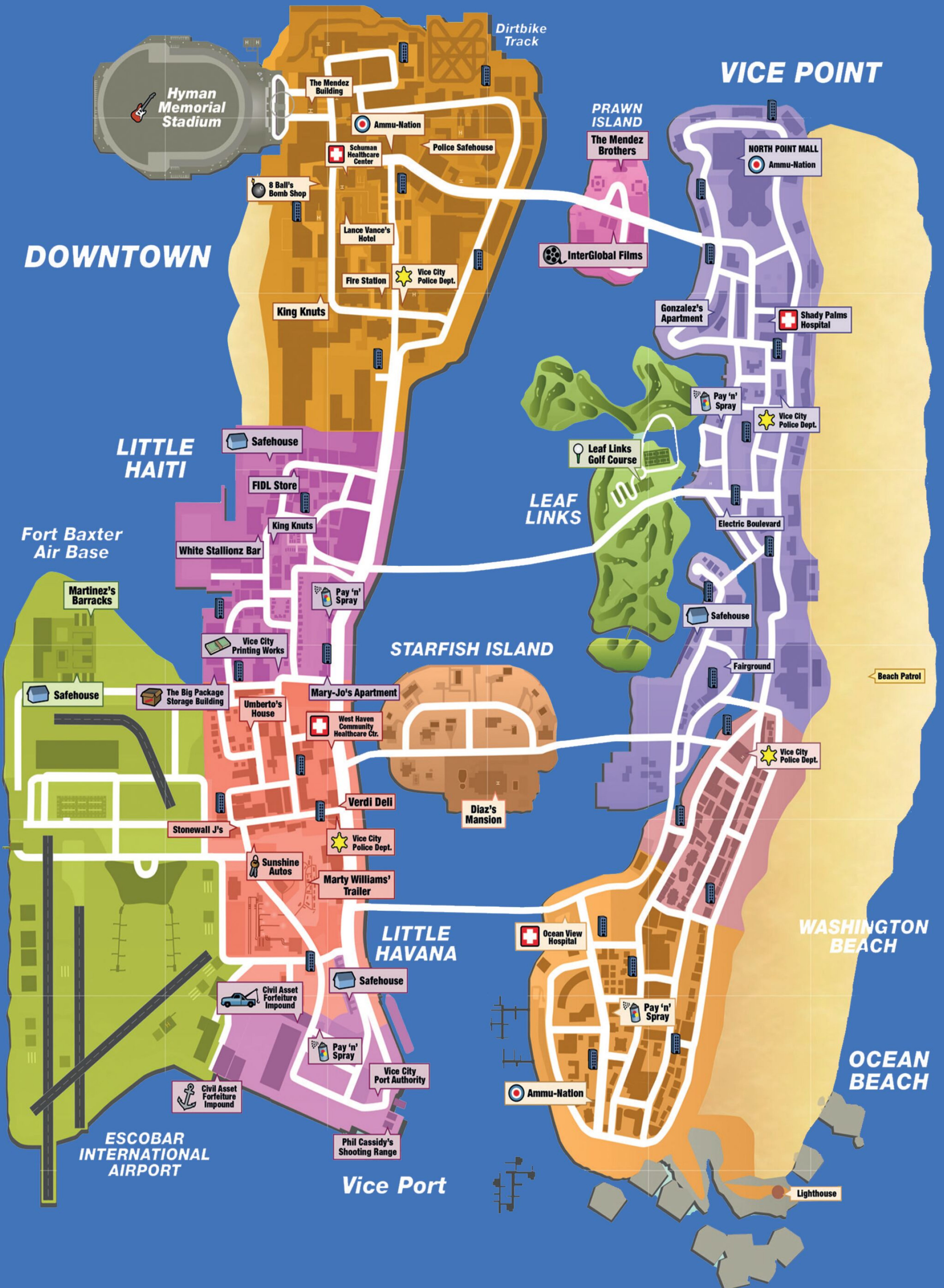
ALL DAY

LEAVE THE CRIME AND GRIME OF LIBERTY CITY BEHIND; IT'S TIME TO VISIT THE HOTTEST HOLIDAY DESTINATION OF 1986 – VICE CITY. YOUR GUIDE IS ANDREW FISHER, WHO WILL GIVE YOU THE LOWDOWN ON THIS HIP AND HAPPENING PLACE.

Vice City is booming, as you will see from the air as you fly into Escobar International Airport. With a population of 1.8 million, many of them Cuban and Haitian, the economy is built on tourism because of those countries' proximity. The city is spread across two main islands joined by bridges, and the airport is in the western half. To the north of the airstrip is Fort Baxter Air Base, and you will frequently see helicopters in the air ferrying rich people to their palatial villas, some of which have their own helipads.

There are so many ways to get around this lush location. The streets are filled with expensive sportscars and more down-to-earth models, or you could enjoy the tropical air by riding a motorbike. Don't forget your insurance – if your car gets damaged or needs a respray, check out Pay 'n Spray for their fast service. You can race across the dunes on a dirt bike on the beaches, and the beautiful blue waterways are filled with boats of all shapes and sizes. It is much safer to go swimming here than in Liberty City, but don't go too deep. We do warn visitors about the risk of an improbable shark attack.

South of the airport is Vice Port, a vital trading link to the Caribbean. Here, you can hire a seaplane or stare across the strait to the marina filled with luxury yachts (including one belonging to the high-profile émigré Colonel Cortez). North of the port is Little Havana and then Little Haiti; these two enclaves are best explored with a guide that can speak the local language and a sidearm for protection. At the far north is Downtown, with the high-rise buildings of the financial district and the popular Hyman Memorial Stadium.





Ocean Beach



Starfish Islands

Heading east from Downtown across the bridge takes us to Prawn Island, home to InterGlobal Films Inc.'s film studio, currently shooting a major new movie. Further east takes us to the city's eastern half and Vice Point. The North Point Mall is great for shopping, with one of three Ammu-Nation franchises found across the city and the Tooled Up DIY store for quality tools. Gash Clothing in the mall is one of several fine outfitters, but it's worth heading south to Rafael's in Ocean Beach for the best suits.

Towards the centre of the eastern island is Links View Heights, overlooking Leaf Links and its prestigious golf club. To the east, you will find the hottest club in Vice City, the Malibu, overlooking the magnificent sands of Washington Beach. But if it is luxury living

you are after, to the west of the Malibu lies the posh mansions of Star View Heights. They lead towards the secluded and high-security compound on Starfish Island, rumoured to belong to a high-profile business person interested in international trade (facilitated by the ships and seaplanes using Vice Port).

Ocean Beach is to the south, with its gorgeous Ocean Drive for cruising in the sunset and plenty of tourist hotels. The Ocean View is considered comfortable and discreet, while the nearby Pole Position club lets you see (but not touch) some of the city's prettiest dancers. Nearby are the Ocean Height Apartments and the Washington Mall.

Congressman Alex Shrub is our most important political representative, while evangelist Pastor Richards (frequently heard



The Malibu



StarView Heights



Little Havana

on the radio and seen on TV) takes care of the spiritual. The climate is lovely here, with year-round sun – even our summer storms are picturesque. There is a thriving music scene in Vice City, with rock band Love Fist making a real name for themselves; you might even run into them at the recording studio Downtown. Check out Café Robina in Little Havana or the Greasy Chopper for more down-to-earth drinks and food.

There are many great business and investment opportunities in Vice City. Cab companies and pizza delivery franchises are always seeking new help. If you have the cash, why not invest in one of the properties for sale? Note that these require regular payments to ensure protection from accidents, collected by agents for your convenience.

Should you find yourself involved with the police, we suggest getting the assistance of a local lawyer such as the well-connected Ken Rosenberg. The Vice City Police Department has four locations around the city, giving regular patrols backup if a situation escalates. If you suffer any unfortunate injury, four well-equipped hospitals (and multiple pharmacies) are located around the city to get you back on your feet. Our First Responders will gladly transport you there, and the medical fees are reasonable. You may also encounter the National Guard and Army Reserve training at Fort Baxter.

So, whether you are relaxing away from home or looking to leave your troubled life in another city behind, welcome to Vice City. ■

FUSION MUSICAL MARVELS

**BEN HONEBONE HIGHLIGHTS
A MUSICAL MARVEL THAT
TRANSCENDS THE VIDEO GAME
GENRE AND, QUITE LITERALLY,
GOES WITH ANYTHING.**



Musical Marvel: USA - Guile's Theme
Game: Street Fighter II
System: Arcade
Composer: Yoko Shimomura
Year: 1991

Soundtrack Link:
<https://bit.ly/3PBeJSw>

SCAN ME!



■ If you're reading this, chances are you already know Guile's Theme tune. It's also highly likely that mentioning it has kick-started the tune in your head (you're welcome). The iconic 16-bit theme tunes from *Street Fighter II* have stood the test of time, being remixed and recreated for modern audiences many times. Though simple by today's standards, the Yamaha YM2151Y sound chip used in Capcom's CPS1 hardware was versatile, created for Yamaha's DX line of keyboards.

I n 2010, when YouTube user guiletheme-fitsall posted the first mash-up entitled, 'Guile's Theme goes with Everything', synced with a clip from 1993's ill-fated *Super Mario Bros.* film adaptation, it



went viral. Since then, the channel ‘Guile’s Theme Fits All’ has received almost three million views. So, why does it go with everything? The answer to that question is elusive. Perhaps it is all simply the effect of “soundtrack dissonance”, where the conflict between images and background music produces an emotional response. When I try to think of another piece of music that has a similar effect to Guile’s Theme, the best match I can think of is Vince Dicola’s ‘Training Montage’ from the film Rocky IV. Both pieces share themes associated with a struggle to achieve victory, so perhaps that is the magic ingredient.

Guile is a major in the US Air Force, and

his stage in *Street Fighter II* is filled with his comrades gathered around an impressive-looking aircraft, cheering him on. Guile is a typically tough, stoic soldier and a proud, dedicated family man. Much like Sylvester Stallone’s Rocky, Guile could easily have been a character in a Hollywood blockbuster film from the 80s (let’s pretend 1994’s *Street Fighter* film never happened). His theme tune is the embodiment of his motivation to win the fight.

From its cleverly structured and odd-numbered intro sequence to its undeniably motivational main melody, Guile’s theme is a masterclass in character identity and an unstoppable ear-worm. ■



SERIAL CLEANERS

FAITH JOHNSON STARTS HER NEW JOB AS A CLEANER.

■ Once in a while, a genuinely unique game gets released that gives you confidence that the industry is still sparkling and hasn't lost its innovation. *Serial Cleaners* is the sequel to 2017's *Serial Cleaner*, which provided gamers with a stealth romp and an art style that popped. Roll on five years, developer Draw Distance has built upon its foundations, and the innovative series feels just as fresh. The premise is simple; take on the role of mob cleaner, the guy that goes in after the hit. Think Winston Wolf in *Pulp Fiction*, and you get some idea about your mission.

What stands out more in the series' second outing is how the story has developed. In *Serial Cleaner*, we see one hero's exploits during the 1970s, but in the sequel, the narrative has caught up with the world of mobsters in the 80s. An interesting aspect of *Serial Cleaners*' story is how it is presented. Four characters are spending time with colleagues during the Christmas Holidays. They are reminiscing over their memories of cleaning up after the mob. Each level is a different memory, and you control the character as if they are telling the story. It's a nice touch and allows you to explore the unfolding story in an intriguing way that slowly builds as you progress through the memories.

The story is divided into chapters, each with four different levels and one for each character in



the game. You don't need to be overly engaged with the story, as each level is a set piece, and the mechanics stay the same throughout. As you get further, the memories become interconnected and play out over short cutscenes between stages. The story also showcases the beautiful art style, a highlight of *Serial Cleaners*.

The gameplay is a mix between puzzle elements and subtle action. You start each level by needing to remove the dead bodies and clear up any remaining evidence, including vacuuming the blood spilt during the hit. It's not as simple as just collecting bodies or running the Hoover round; guards and cops patrol the crime scene and are out to get you. The cops are pretty dumb for the most part; it's not hard to avoid their eyes or hide from them. Mainly due to your ability to crouch and jump into hiding spots such as dumpsters and showers.

The cops being dumb is a fun part of the game's dark humour. We play as the anti-hero, the mobster's cleaners, and the cops are the villains. They come in different varieties, and early on in the game, most are not even cops; they're just security guards. But as things progress, the eagle-eyed cops arrive with better weapons that make avoiding them tougher. The best bit concerning the cops is running away from them, *GTA*-style, once they're alerted to your presence. At these moments, you must head for a nearby hiding spot and wait for everything to calm before continuing.

It creates noise when you run, close a door, or vacuum the carpets. Creeping around keeps your noise profile low, and you must switch

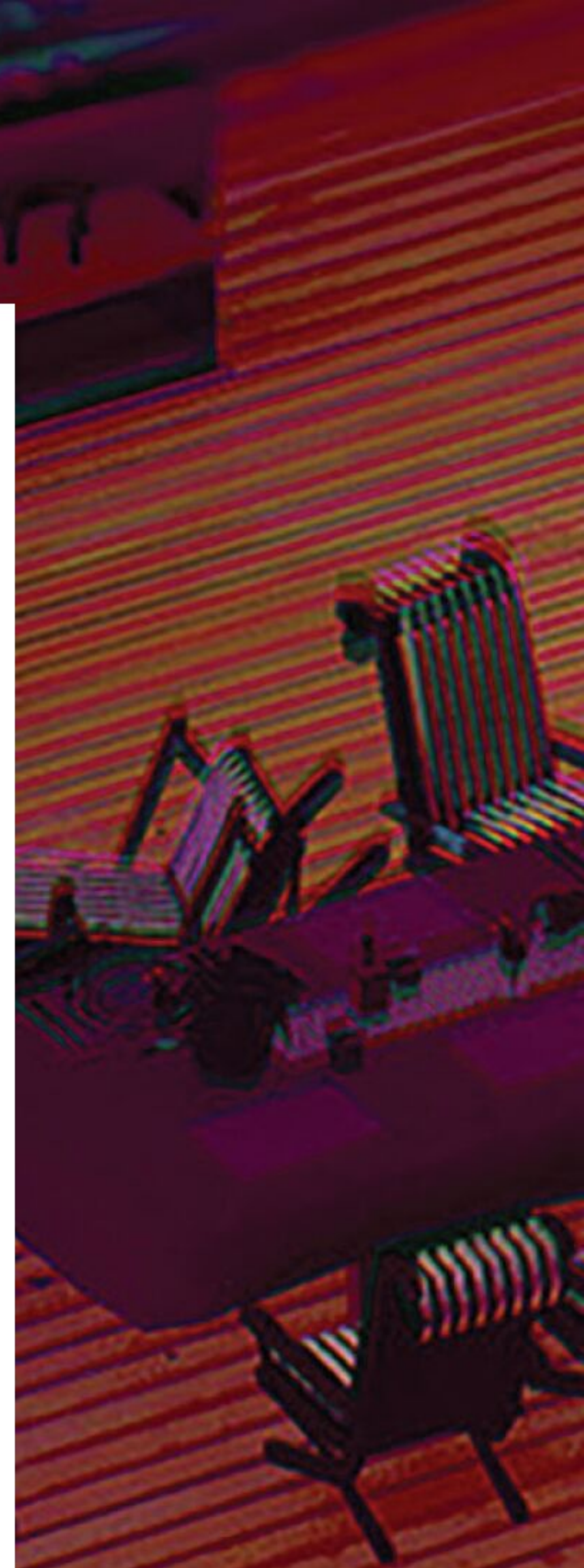


between cleaning and hiding often. It's not just the cops' eyes you need to avoid; their ears are just as focused on finding you. The save system works well, utilising your vehicle as the level base and place to save your progress. This system creates natural breaks in the gameplay as you will want to save each time you bring back a body or piece of evidence to the car. If the cops catch you, the level will restart or load to the last save.

Each level is carefully designed to make you think. It would be best if you didn't go running in, gun-ho, waving your vacuum cleaner around the crime scene. Holding the left trigger zooms out and slows the action to give you an overview that helps with decision-making. The early stages of each level are about familiarising yourself with the room and watching how the guards move. This reveals interesting approaches to try, such as air ducts and roofs, that aid your stealthy approach. For those who want to get more hands-on, you can throw bags of evidence and tools at the guards to temporarily distract them.

You can complete each level in many different ways. Concentrate on the body first, then the clean-up. Or, mix things up, cleaning as you go. *Serial Cleaners* does give you the freedom to approach each mission as you want, but the gameplay itself does start to get repetitive toward the end of the game. Using the four characters' unique moves and abilities didn't help alleviate the sense that the same things were repeatedly happening. But this is the only negative when considering the game's overall quality because

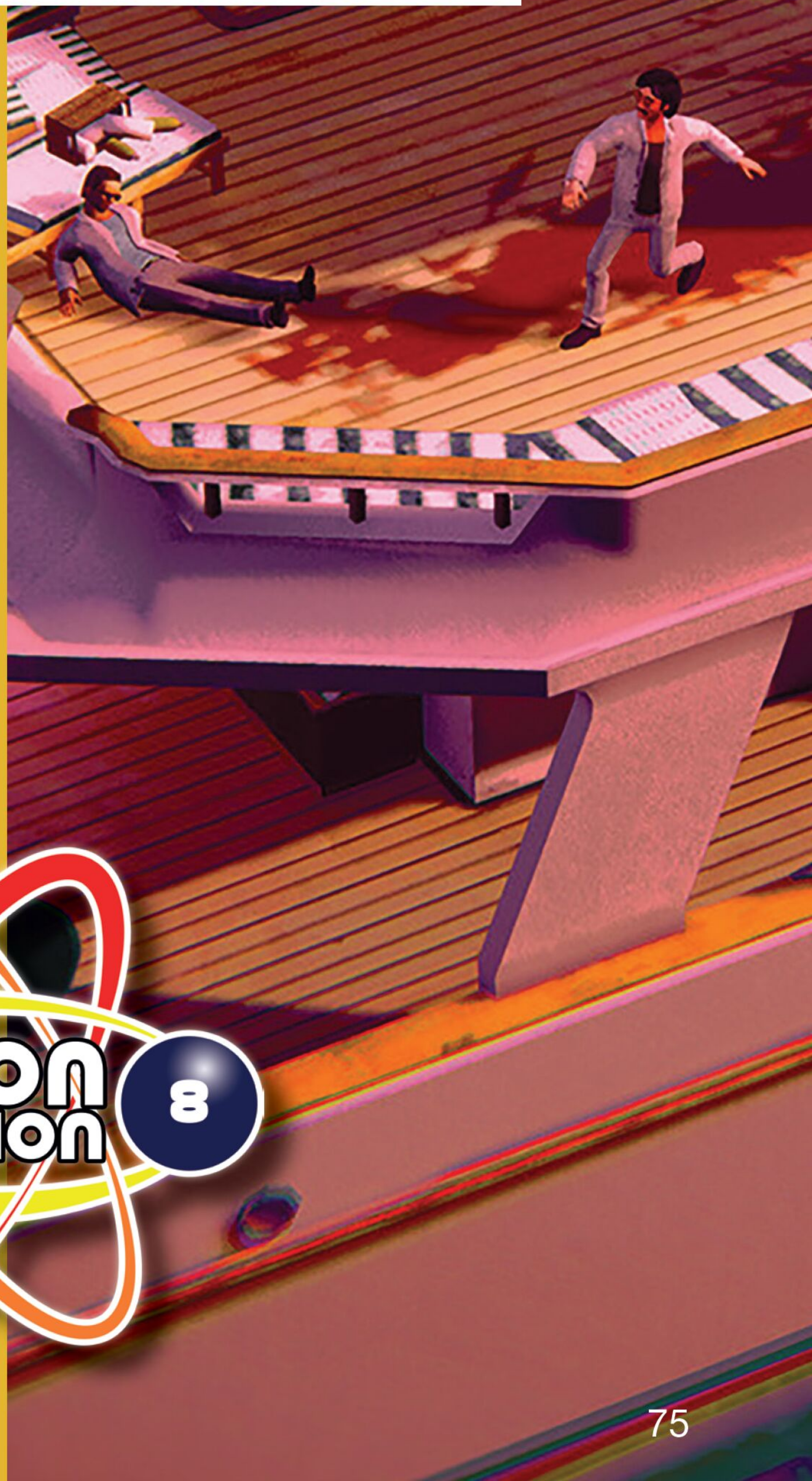




each level has its own theme and gimmicks that help break up the gameplay.

The standout aspect of *Serial Cleaners* is its bold and eye-catching presentation. From the opening scene to the subtle 80s background music, this game knows what it wants to be. It feels like a game that Quentin Tarantino would make, especially if you combine the visual and sound style with the overall intrigue of the story. The references to pop culture, such as the Quick Stop from Kevin Smith's *Clerks* movies, are seen throughout. These small moments make *Serial Cleaners* more memorable, and you will enjoy pointing at the screen and saying, "that's from that movie!"

In conclusion, *Serial Cleaners* is a well-made game that goes out of its way to present a different perspective and a unique style. Everything from the controls to the level design shows class, and the difficulty level feels just right. There are moments of repetition in the gameplay, although the intriguing story and fun way the cops interact with you make up for this. It's an excellent game for those who want to get into slower stealth games and is interesting enough to keep genre veterans engaged. *Serial Cleaners* is certainly an offer you can't refuse and is of great value considering the quality on show. ■





THE FACE OF SKELLETOR



TOY POLLOI PROVES THE OLD ADAGE, "THEY DON'T MAKE THEM LIKE THEY USED TO".

■ I was excited a few years ago when Mattel announced they were bringing back the Masters of the Universe figures in a classic style called the 'Origins' line that would match the look of the 80s toys but with more articulation and posability. It was what I and many fans had wanted: new toys that looked like the old toys we remembered and loved that we could play with all over again.

The original vintage Skeletor figure is one of my favourites, so much so that I am getting close to owning fifty of them. All the original figures were based mainly around a few basic body



parts with different armour and heads, and even though Skeletor's head was slightly different from how it appeared in the cartoon, you knew it was him. A simple green/yellow skull with a blue hood over the top and some basic paint applications to give the skull details. Simple enough that Mattel should be able to recreate that on the new figures.

I quickly ordered the new 'Origins' He-Man and Skeletor online and waited for them to arrive, hoping they were everything I dreamed of. Sadly that was not the case. The bodies, weapons, and accessories on the new figures were fine, but the heads of the two figures left much to be desired. How could they get these two iconic characters so wrong?

Both had had a makeover and lost the charm of the original figures. He-man had a pained look to him, and Skeletor had been given a gaping, laughing mouth, and his face no longer looked like a skull, just a yellow circle in a hood. Had they not watched the show or looked at the original toys when designing these new figures?

The fans soon voiced their dislike of these new faces, and a second run of both figures was produced using the same bodies but with all new head sculpts. Had they managed to fix what was wrong?

Like the first releases, I eagerly placed an order and waited for them to arrive. First, I opened He-Man, and he was so much better. The head was close to how the vintage figures



looked, and with better body articulation, this figure hit the mark. Skeletor's head was undoubtedly better, but also worse at the same time. The mouth was now closed, and they had made a good go of getting the sculpt of the face right, but it still didn't look like Skeletor to me. The paint application didn't do it justice at all. The sculpture underneath was good, but the paint lacked definition, and the head had no character. It was such a disappointment.

Having spent many years learning how to fix and paint toys, of which many hours included repairing damaged paint on the original Skeletor toys, I wanted to see if I could fix Mattel's mistakes. By this time, these figures were starting to turn up cheap, so I picked up another one to attempt to paint it with the classic Skeletor look.

I already know how to mix the correct

colours for his face; two shades of green and yellow for the skull, black for the eyes, nose and teeth, and a small amount of red to make his eyes glow. I'd never attempted anything like this before, but it was worth a try, and what's the worst that could happen?

I started the task with a steady hand and small fine-tipped paintbrushes. I began by painting the dark green around the outside of his skull and adding more shading to bring out his jawbone. Then, adding the primary yellow colour allowed me to fine-tune the shape of his face and remove the extra teeth lines they had given him. More black was needed around the eyes to achieve the correct shape, and adding thin black frown lines gave him the classic look I wanted.

I was pleased with the result as it looks just like the Skeletor I grew up with. It's hard to see how Mattel got this so wrong. They used all



Left: The original Skeletor head.
Right: The first reissue Skeletor head.



THE ORIGINS OF SKELETOR

The first wave of figures released for the Masters of the Universe toy line were all designed by Mattel artist Mark Taylor. Mark had sketched various mummy-like characters before he worked at Mattel, which clearly influenced his designs. A few iterations and sketches followed before something resembling the Skeletor we know and love appeared, including the skull face, cross and bones on the chest, and blue skin.

Mattel sculptor Tony Guerrero turned this sketch into a clay model and painted it with the now iconic yellow and green skull face. A few more modifications took place before the final version of Skeletor was approved. These allowed for body parts to be re-used across multiple figures, a common element of the toy line.

the right colours but got the application wrong. There is still hope that they will update Skeletor in future and get him right, but for now, I have a version I am delighted with. Since making a video on this project, I have seen many others give this a go with excellent results.

Projects like this are great fun, so maybe it's a good thing that Mattel didn't get it right the first time. It gives me a chance to play, and that is, after all, what toys are all about, no matter what age you happen to be. ■



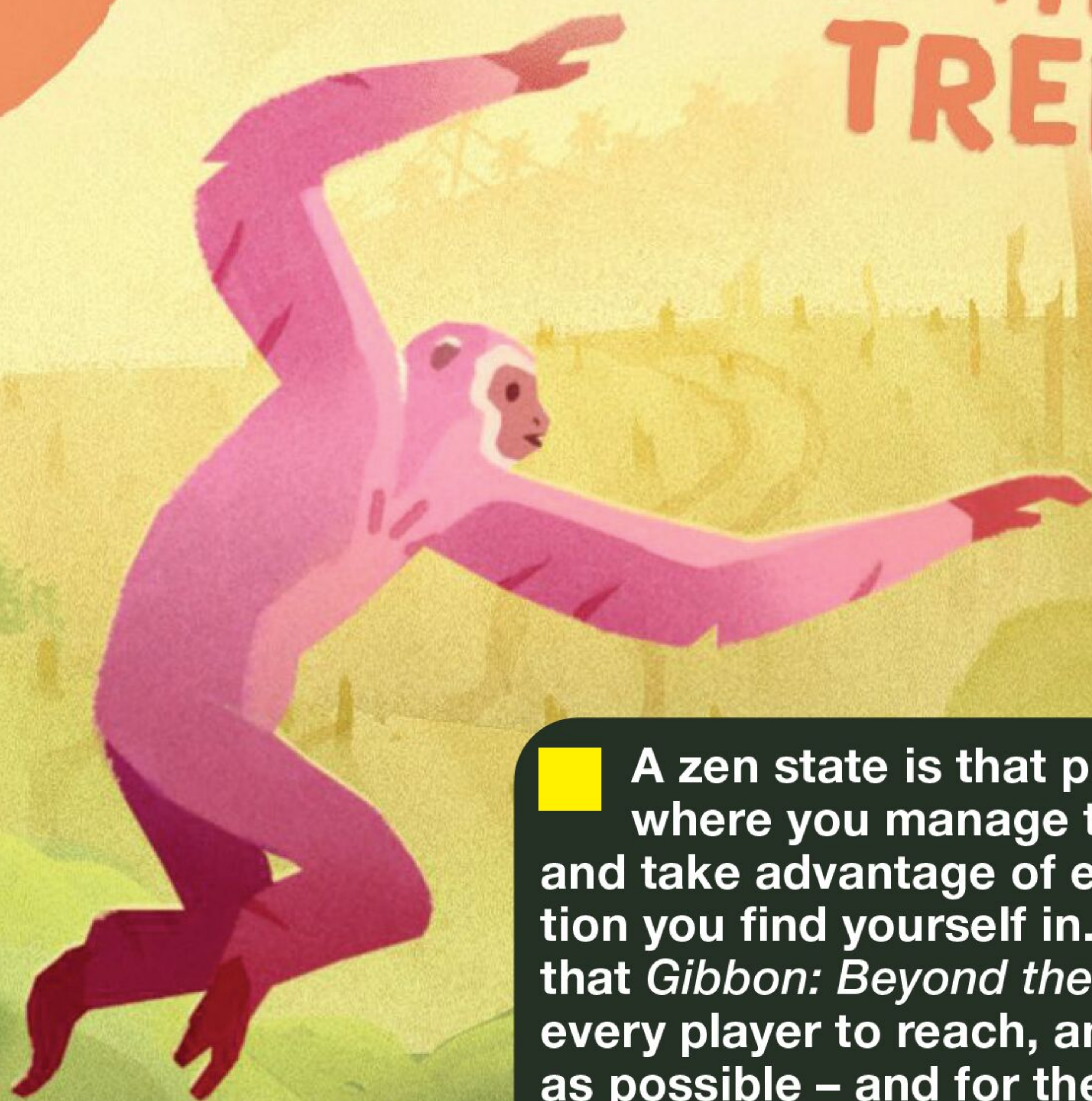
Left: The revised reissue Head.

Right: The modified Toy Polloi Skeletor head.



Gibbon

BEYOND THE TREES



**CHRIS O'REGAN
TAKES A SWING AT
BROKEN RULES'
LATEST GAME.**

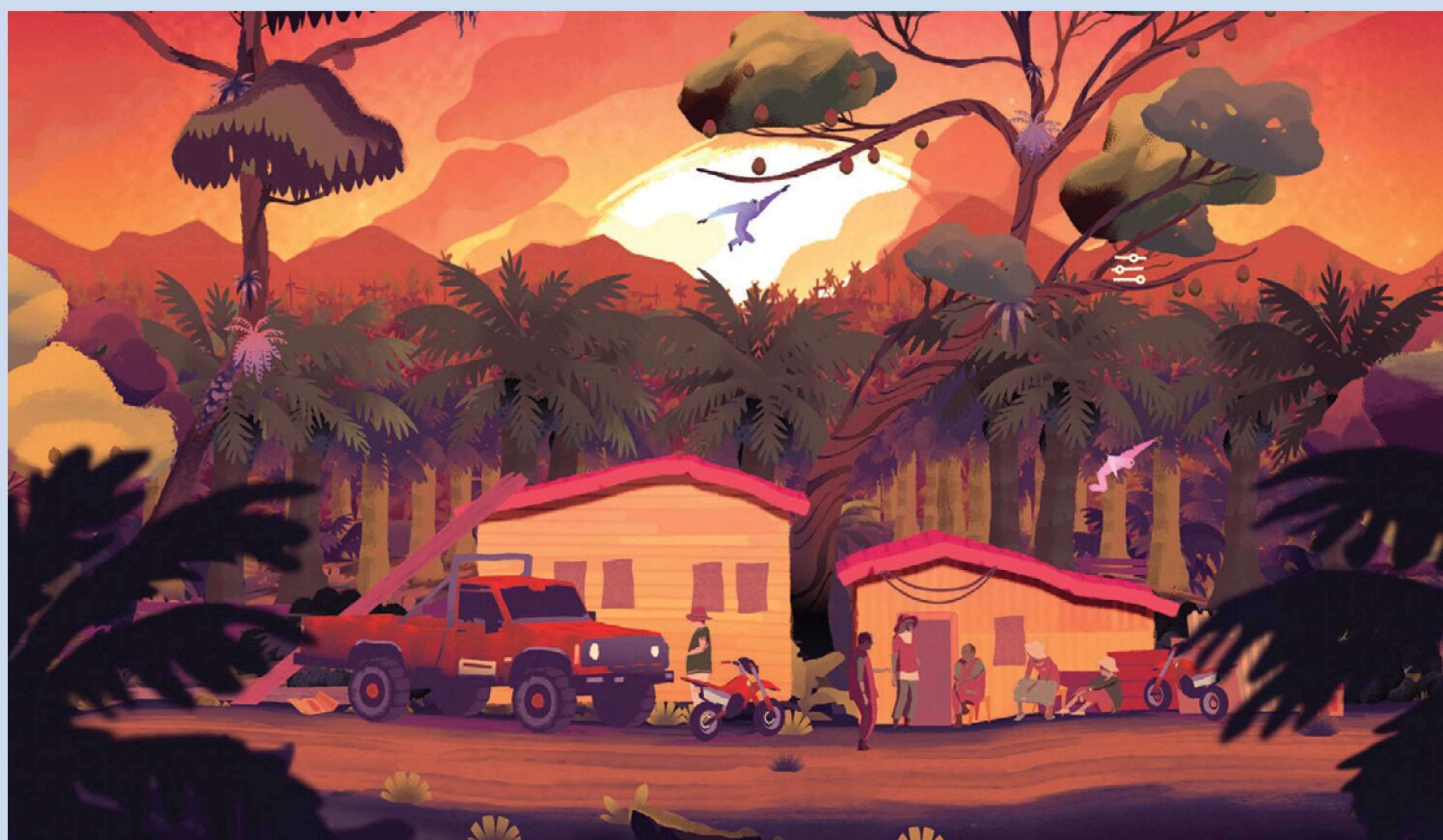
■ A zen state is that precious point where you manage to anticipate and take advantage of every situation you find yourself in. It's this state that *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* wants every player to reach, and for as long as possible – and for the most part, it succeeds.

A side-scrolling 2D dexterity-based platform title, *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* is an 'infinite runner', i.e., constantly moving, and the player needs to guide their character through an ever-scrolling milieu, all while trying to avoid hazards and external threats. The player in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* is charged with flinging a pink colour gibbon through forests, lumber yards, and towns. I say 'flinging' as that is precisely what you must do in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* as it's its primary means of motion.

During the game's development, Broken Rules studied the movements and behaviours of gibbons to ensure they were portrayed accurately in the game. This led them to reproduce the swinging motion found in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* as the pink gibbon grabs onto outcroppings in the environment. They propel themselves across the landscape as they let go, effectively flying. It's mesmerising to become an agent of this fluid motion and one of the strongest aspects of *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees*. It is a game that celebrates momentum and encourages the player to maintain it as much as possible. If they do, they can reach higher into the sky and avoid many hazards in the process.

Leaping vast distances via momentum is not the only tool available to help traverse the intricate landscapes found in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees*. It is also possible to run and slide. A less commonly used mode of transport, it's sometimes

required when the player's pink gibbon lands on a surface. Furthermore, it is possible to combine sliding and jumping to maintain the build-up of momentum, which is both fleeting and in short supply in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees*. It's up to the player to earn it, and they can only do so by knowing when to leap, run, and somersault. Wait, 'somersault'? Yes, you can trigger a somersault in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees*, which is something gibbons can't do in reality. But this is a video



game, so one can forgive Broken Rules a smidgeon of artistic licence. If the player successfully pulls off this stunt, they're rewarded with a speed boost and a little more of that sought-after momentum.

As with most infinite runners, *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* has a simplistic control system. It consists of 3 buttons; the right shoulder button or trigger is for jumping and grabbing outcroppings, the left is for running and sliding, and left on the D-pad triggers somersaults. It is also possible to cancel a leap by pressing down on the D-pad, but this is not often required unless you're trying to reach a specific object in a level.

The story of *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* is not a happy one. It concerns the plight of critically endangered gibbons and describes the many causes of how they came to be in this state. These range

from deforestation, poaching, and the impact of climate change. The player hurls themselves across various environments, starting with a lush forest with an ominous pillar of smoke in the background. Two parts make up the game: Story, and Liberation. Story has the player venturing through the environment with their yellow partner and a lilac-coloured child on their back. The presence of the yellow gibbon grants a special partnering move that allows the two creatures





to fling each other through the air, once again giving more of that precious momentum. The story takes place over ten chapters and acts as a training mode for Liberation, which is the core of *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees*.

Liberation mode traces the exploits of the lilac-coloured gibbon and is unavailable until the completion of Story mode. It has the player moving through procedurally generated levels and liberating various rare creatures from captivity by simply landing on them. I say simply, as it requires the player to guide the gibbon towards the caged creature with no ability to go left. *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* constantly scrolls right, so it's not uncommon to miss these unfortunate beings.

The presentation here is quite impressive. Most notably, the use of colours to highlight where the player is against the background of reds, greens, and beige helps when moving at speed. The camera does a reasonable job of zooming in and out, so the player has ample warning as to what they are to do next, and the sound design is equally impressive, with gibbons calling to one another and the location of nearby hazards often being heard before seen. The score is suitably atmospheric and does not become overwhelming.

Leaps, or swings, of faith are somewhat prevalent in *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees*, and this can be problematic. They rarely lead to player death, however, as such hazards are usually well-advertised. Nevertheless, it can be aggravating when there are few opportunities to gain much-needed momentum. Still, it is up to the player to read the environment and exploit whatever they can find.

I found *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* to be a very relaxing and rewarding game. It gently encourages the player to do better but does not punish them too hard, thanks to a generous checkpoint system. Its message of conservation and the impact humanity is having on the other inhabitants of this planet is often present but without being too preachy. You can undoubtedly enjoy *Gibbon: Beyond the Trees* for what it is, and that's certainly something I did a great deal. ■



What are you playing?

The Teen Review



Words by Melanie Honebone

■ Following CRASH Live! in 2022, Melanie Honebone decided to put the power of reviewing games back into the hands of teenagers. Inspired, she chatted with fresh minds aged 15 to 19 from five schools across South Wales about their game opinions and recommendations. She then immersed herself in their world and gave her verdict.

This article started at CRASH Live! in Walsall last year with Nicola and Anthony Caulfield's documentary "The Rubber Keyed Wonder – 40 Years of the ZX Spectrum." While the film was playing, I found myself dwelling on some original concepts behind CRASH magazine and how it empowered teenagers, through writing, to make or break a game. In the early 1980s, home computers were revolutionary, and many of us were riding the euphoria of being part of something new as we flocked to John Menzies to read reviews of the latest games. By 1986, CRASH was the biggest-selling computer magazine in Britain. We bought games based on the buzz of

CRASH reviews by teens who understood our gaming needs. We haggled and swapped with each other in the schoolyard for our next gaming fix. Game crazes swept through us with religious fervour, as month by month the technological revolution advanced - a religion you, the reader, still subscribe to.

Fast forward to the 21st Century, where tech is king and the computer gaming world is long-established. The magazine aisles are lonely places, and gaming emporia are becoming an endangered species. The decline in the second-hand games market has accelerated as next-gen consoles shift towards games sold on digital platforms only. For teenagers, if you're lucky to be born into a family of gamer parents (or gamer grandparents), then the big-budget games could be yours. Everyone else has to wait until their birthday or Christmas as game prices advance up to the £70 mark and beyond. A new market of idle gamers and budget titles swamp mobile phones across the land aimed at those short on time, skill, or cash. For those on a pocket money budget, gaming is as much about savvy



Above: The very successful CRASH Live! event took place in November 2022 at Bescot Stadium in Walsall.

spending as it is about gameplay or graphics.

Today’s youth have access to the most extensive library of computer games in history due to the internet. They exist in a universe where Facebook, YouTube, and touchscreen technology were around before they were born. Phones, tablets, consoles, and TVs are interchangeable in their purpose. Wi-Fi and connectivity can make or break your gaming, social life, and even your homework submission. Gaming news sources are equally as diverse, thanks to social media. With infinite advice from infinite sources, deciding what new game to try next can be overwhelming. Throw in the prelaunch hype, beta testing, and persistent advertising, and suddenly the noise is deafening. Unsurprisingly, some teens are turning their back on media saturation in favour of traditional sources such as friend recommendations and playground hype.

Back to CRASH Live! 2022, and I’m wondering how I can follow in Roger Kean’s footsteps by putting the power of game reviews into the hands of teenagers. None of the teenagers I know read magazines, let alone want to write for one. In today’s market, there seems to be little loyalty to one gaming console over another. How could this even work forty years later? I arrived at a possible solution: I would ask a group of teens to recommend games to me, and in return, I would diligently play their recommendations. It didn’t matter how big or small; I vowed to play them all. Over several months, our knowledge exchange would continue, and we would deliver a series of game reviews together. And so, with parental permission, my teens and I took a short detour from our weekly maths tuition to provide a 21st Century Fusion solution in honour of a 1980s CRASH legend.

Review: Stack

Emily (aged 17):

You should play *Stack* on your phone. You have to stack your blocks as they come onto the screen. It gradually gets harder as it gets faster. It’s on the App Store.

Score: 8/10

My verdict:

Stack is really intense and very addictive. Each time a block is misaligned, the next on the screen is smaller and arrives faster. I fail just enough times that I want to throw my phone across the room but succeed regularly enough that the frustration is quickly forgotten. I’m already on level 62 and desperate to chase Emily’s high score.

Score: 9/10



Review: Grand Theft Auto V

Rhys (aged 16):

I've just been playing *Grand Theft Auto V*. I get to do things in the game that I can't do in real life. I enjoy doing the main missions, and the storyline is really interesting. I play as Trevor because he's just nuts. I didn't tell my mum what the game was about because I

didn't think she would approve. I like the freedom it gives you to drive about and do things you would never do. I'm playing it on my Xbox Series X.

Score: 9/10

My verdict:

Parents, please don't panic if you catch your teen stealing a car or shooting people up in the game, as this does not mean your teen has lost their moral compass. They are simply using the game to fully explore the limits of what makes us human. The character of Trevor is the perfect representation of life on the outer edge of these limits. At the end of a hard day at the office, we've all had those moments where we want to flip a finger to the world. Isn't stealing a Rhino Tank and going on a rampage from the safety of your sofa just the perfect way to unwind and de-stress? I love *GTAV*. **Score: 10/10**



Review: Minecraft

Charlotte (aged 18):

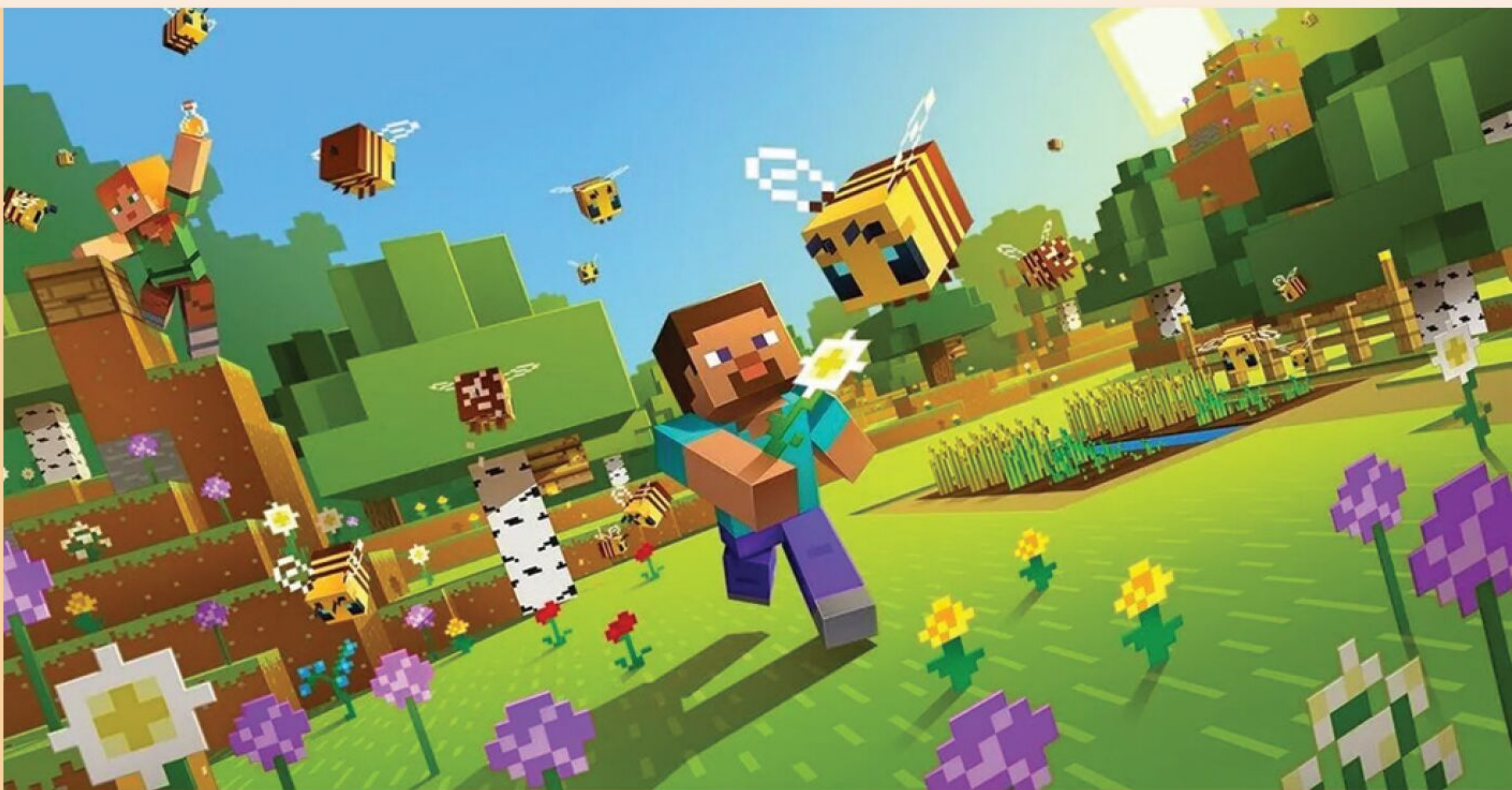
Minecraft is a creative outlet for me. I'm playing it on Xbox One. I prefer multiplayer because it's relaxing, and I can play it with my friends. We've built an entire world where we can meet and chat.

Score: 9/10

My verdict:

Minecraft used to be simple. It was mining and crafting, and that was about all. Hiding in a hole to avoid night spiders and zombies and foraging for flint was essential in understanding economic, scientific, and personal growth. Nowadays, there are multiple expansion packs and add-ons, and as a result, I feel it's lost something. I can instantly buy a new wardrobe and get a job in the city, and something about that doesn't sit right with me. By being able to buy my way out of the struggle, there's less sense of resourcefulness or resilience. I don't want to use *Minecraft* as a chat room, either. I want to chase a pig with a log.

Score: 8/10



Review: Sims IV

Lois (aged 17):

I recommend *Sims IV*. You can design your own room and your own characters in the story. You do tasks to work towards a job or aspiration. You can spend a lot of money to pay for the expansion packs.

Score: 8/10

My verdict:

I can't pick wallpaper in real life, so designing my *Sims IV* home is a bit overwhelming. Several hours later, my Sim is enjoying numerous awkward conversations at a wine bar in town. Working out relationship rules and social interaction isn't my thing, and I keep looking for a way to bend the rules and have some real fun. Why can't one of my Sim aspirations be a car chase?

Score: 5/10



Review: Rocket League

Harry (aged 16):

I'm playing *Rocket League* Season 8. It's a mix between football and cars. It's everywhere. You can play it on PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, and many places. **Score: 9/10**

My verdict:

Any resemblance to football or soccer is totally coincidental. *Rocket League* reminds me of the Royal Shrovetide Football Match. This mass free-for-all has been played since the 12th Century in Ashbourne, Derbyshire; it was rumoured that, back then, they used a severed head instead of a ball. Each *Rocket League* match is like a demolition derby crossed with a cage match. It's pure carnage, and I love it. I've not laughed this hard at a game for a very long time.

Score: 9/10



Netflix

Gwen (aged 16):

FUSION is a great games magazine, but I don't play games. I use my phone to watch Netflix in my room, which is useful as I don't have my own TV.

My verdict:

Back in the 1980s, I remember a kid at school brought in a Casio TV 400, and it blew my mind. The little 2-inch LCD screen was so cutting edge but totally unaffordable at the time. Now, I can finally have a TV in my pocket thanks to the infinite flexibility of the smartphone. Top marks for 21st-century inventiveness and for making me put down my controller and spend a few hours watching murder documentaries instead.

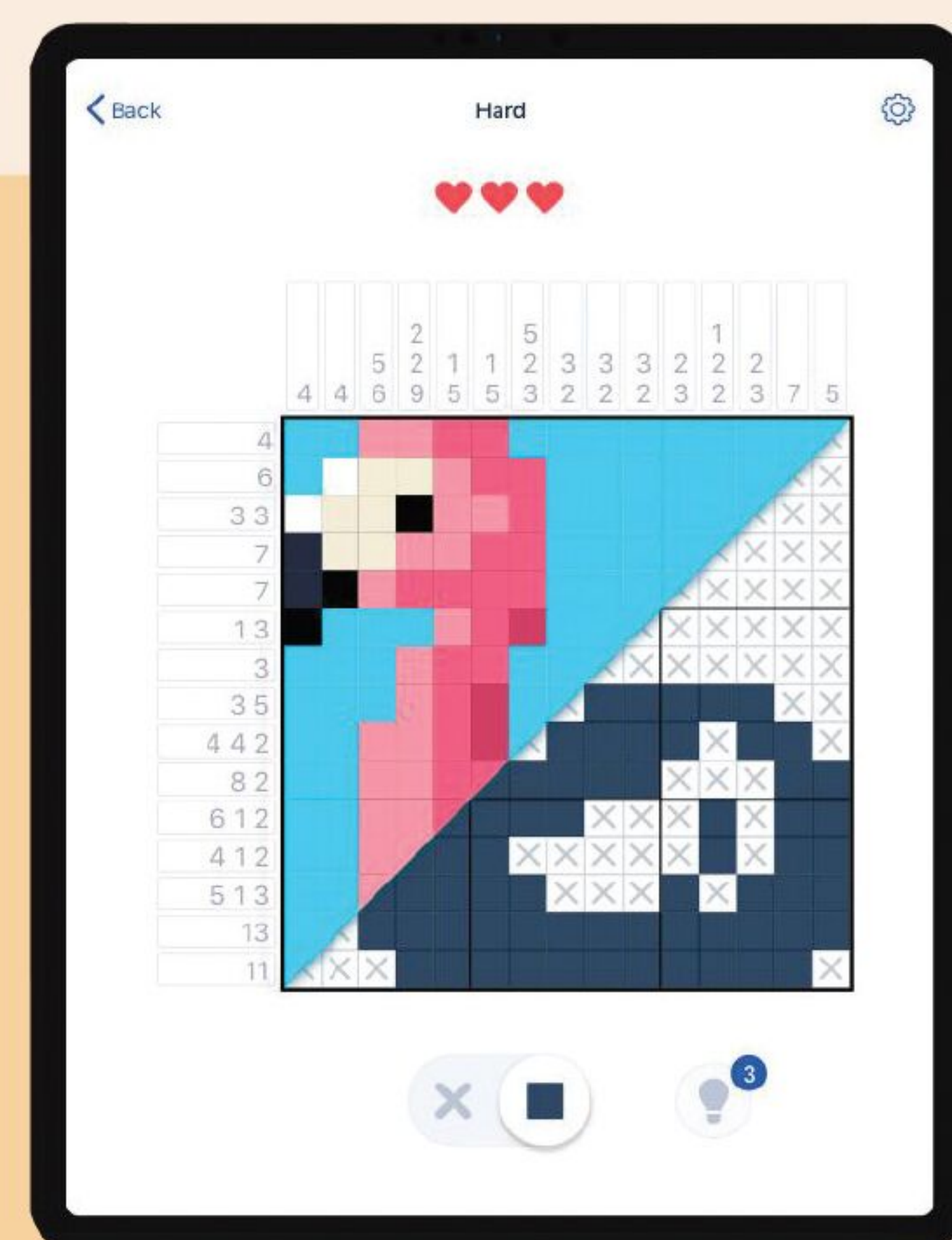
Review: Nonogram

Carys (aged 19):

I'm playing *Nonogram*. It's fun, logical, and calming and takes my mind off stuff. The pictures are awful, and you can barely tell what they are, but I like the challenge of solving the puzzles. I play it on my iPhone. **Score: 8/10**

My verdict:

Nonogram is a simple digital take on the old picture cross puzzle books I bought from the newsagent when I was a kid. The concept is simple: fill the grid with the correct number of squares to complete the picture using the clues. As the levels progress, images become much more complex, and the logic required to decide the next step becomes more challenging and addictive. **Score: 9/10**



Review: Mario Kart Wii

Lili (aged 16):

I'm playing *Mario Kart*. It's competitive, and I like the satisfaction of beating my older sister at something. We play on the Wii, but you can play it anywhere. **Score: 10/10**

My verdict:

You grow into *Mario Kart* when you're three and never really grow out of it. It's wholesome family fun whilst simultaneously being Scalextric on acid. It's a drunk Friday night after the pub with your mates and also a Sunday afternoon with your grandma. *Mario Kart* always has me giggling far more than a driving game should. It's all things to all people, and that's what makes *Mario Kart* unbeatable. **Score: 10/10**



It's hard to put into words everything that has happened. I find myself typing sentences I would never have dreamed of just a few months ago. An idea for an article turned into a project and ended with a total change in my gaming habits. I've fallen in love with football (*Rocket League*), left Steve in a dark hole (*Minecraft*), and stolen a tank (*Grand Theft Auto V*). It has also been an education through puzzles, idle gamers, and drawing programs. I've ended up watching murder documentaries (Netflix) and throwing bananas (*Mario Kart*). I've discovered that pockets of friendship groups still have the power to perpetuate a game for months, a recommendation can make or break a game, and word of mouth in the schoolyard still rules.

There have been some surprising titles that, had they not been recommended, I would have never thought to play. Before this experience, I would reject games based on their cover artwork, or a lack of interest in a particular

subject matter would blind me to the point where I would miss out on some fantastic gameplay. In hindsight, I am not at all surprised by this. Advertising has become such a finely tuned art form that marketing aimed at someone in their teens shouldn't even end up on the radar of this 50-year-old. It has been interesting sharing knowledge across the generation gap, rediscovering games that have stood the test of time, and discovering future classics.

Magazines and media may have changed this century, but how we talk about games seems immutable. Forty years ago, CRASH magazine opened my eyes to new games and new ideas on recommendations from teenagers. Today's teens have done the same in sharing their opinions and enthusiastically welcoming me into their world. Putting my gaming habits in the control of a younger demographic is a refreshing way to bridge a generation gap and an exercise I wholly recommend. ■



For all your Retro news!



FUSIONRGAMER.COM





Photo © Bandai Namco Toys.

WORDS BY ALAN HAMMERTON

Created by Yoshiyuki Tomino, “Mobile Suit Gundam” premiered in Japan on April 7, 1979. The series was set in the Universal Century (UC) timeline, where humanity has expanded into space colonies and is engaged in a war for independence. The series introduced complex characters, deep storylines, and realistic war themes, setting it apart from other giant robot anime of its time.

Following the success of the original series, Gundam expanded into various timelines and alternate universes, allowing for different stories and variations of the Mobile Suit concept. Some of the notable alternate universes include Mobile Suit Gundam Wing (1995), Iron-Blooded Orphans (2015), and the latest series, Witch from Mercury (2022). Each series brings a unique spin to the Gundam universe while maintaining the core elements of mecha combat and political drama.

Gundam has profoundly impacted Japanese pop culture and the mecha genre. Not only

has it influenced subsequent anime series, but it also left a mark on science fiction storytelling worldwide. The themes explored in Gundam, such as war, humanity, and identity, have resonated with audiences for decades, contributing to its enduring popularity.

Gunpla traces its origin back to the early 80s, when Bandai, a Japanese toy company, released the first Gundam plastic model kit. This kit was a 1/144 scale model of the RX-78-2 Gundam, the main Mobile Suit from the original “Mobile Suit Gundam” anime series. At that time, the “Mobile Suit Gundam” TV series had faced challenges in gaining popularity during its initial broadcast in 1979. However, the introduction of the model kit changed the game for both the anime and the hobby.

As fans began purchasing Gunpla model kits, the Gundam franchise experienced a significant surge in popularity. This boost in interest became known as the “Gundam Boom,” leading to increased viewership of the anime and a

growing fascination with the mecha designs. The success of Gunpla not only revitalised the



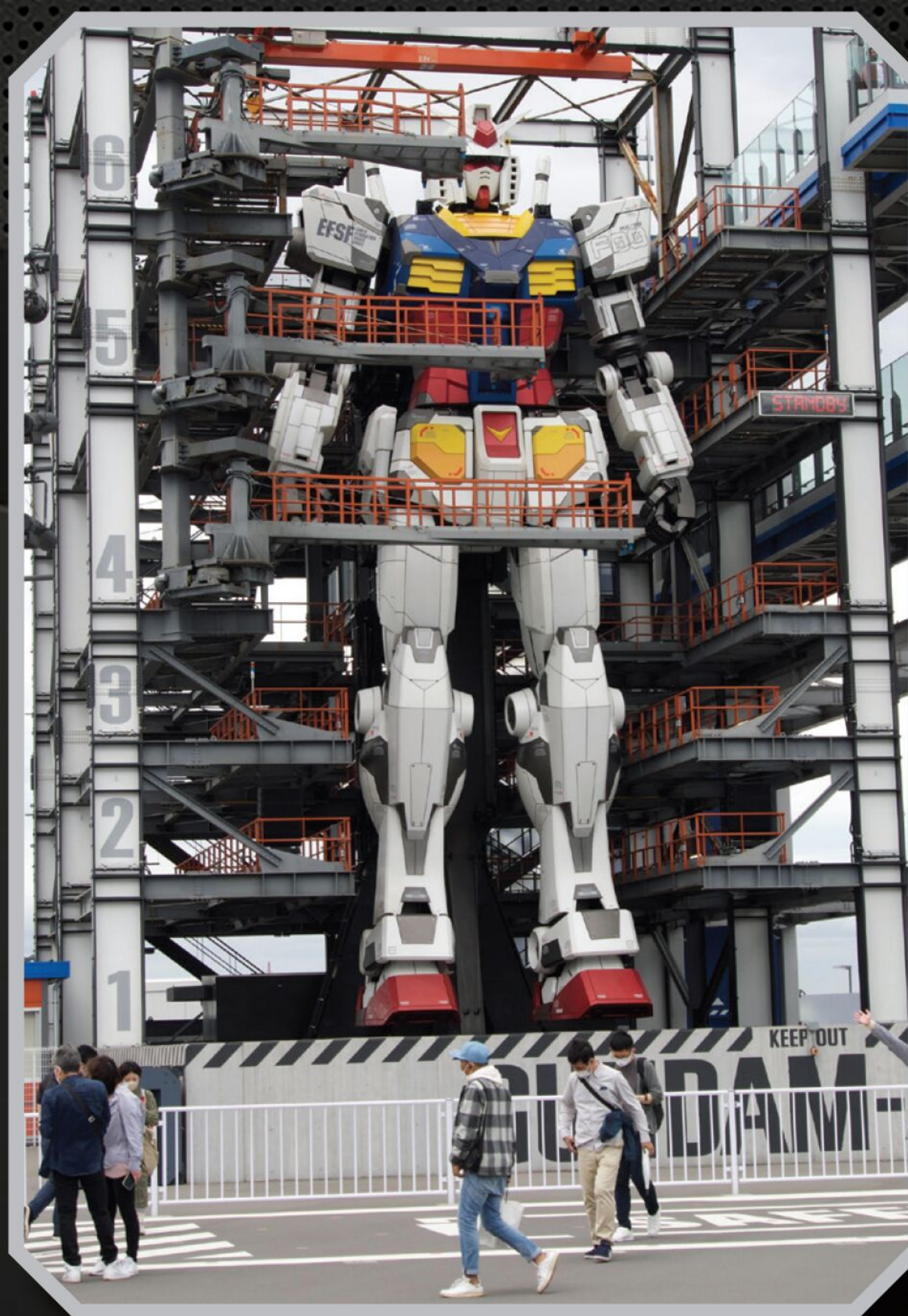


Photo by Alan Hammerton.

GUNDAM FACTORY YOKOHAMA

Located on the dockside near the cruise terminal in Yokohama, Japan, Gundam Factory Yokohama was created to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Gundam franchise. Opening to the public in December 2020, the main attraction of Gundam Factory Yokohama is a life-sized, moving, and fully articulated model of the iconic RX-78-2 Gundam, the original Mobile Suit from the original “Mobile Suit Gundam” series.

The massive Gundam statue stands around 18 meters tall and features impressive animations, such as moving its head, its arms, and even kneeling down. Visitors can witness the Gundam’s awe-inspiring movements during scheduled performances known as “Gundam Docking Operations”. Apart from the Gundam statue, Gundam Factory Yokohama also offers various interactive exhibits, galleries, and shops dedicated to the Gundam franchise and Gunpla hobby. Visitors can learn more about the history of Gundam, explore model displays, and shop for exclusive merchandise related to the series.



Gundam franchise but also contributed to the growth of the plastic model industry as a whole. Gunpla became a cultural phenomenon in Japan and gained international popularity, appealing to enthusiasts worldwide.

Since the introduction of Gunpla, Bandai has continued to develop and improve Gunpla kits, offering various grades of complexity and scales to cater to different skill levels and preferences. Today, kits can be found in distinct categories - High Grade (HG), Real Grade (RG), Master Grade (MG), and Perfect Grade (PG) - each step up in grade increasing the levels of detail and articulation. The Perfect Grade Unleashed RX-78-2 kit is an absolute work of art, which has to be seen up close to appreciate the level of engineering that goes into these kits. Adam Savage, of Mythbusters fame, has a great video showing the entire build process, which I encourage you to watch.

There are some Gundams that are very much the “face” of the brand, the RX-78 mentioned

Photo © Bandai Namco Toys.



Photo by Alan Hammerton.



Photo © Bandai Namco Toys.



Photo by Alan Hammerton.



above being what most people would recognise, but over the years and with each new Gundam series that is launched, new Gundam suits, such as Barbatos in “Iron Blooded Orphans” and the XVX-016 Gundam Aerial featured in “The Witch from Mercury”, are turned into Gunpla models.

The Gunpla hobby has become more than just assembling models; it’s evolved into a creative and expressive pursuit. Builders have almost endless ways to customise their Gunpla with paint, decals, and modifications to create unique, personalised designs. The great thing about Gunpla is you can spend hundreds of hours creating a masterpiece or just as easily build a kit with no experience; either way, you end up with something that looks incredible. Bandai designs almost all Gunpla kits using exceptionally high-quality coloured plastic that doesn’t need painting. Add the included stickers

to finish off a very detailed scale model of a 20-meter-high Mobile Suit.

To support the hobby and the massive popularity of creating custom dioramas, Bandai established the Gunpla Builders World Cup (GBWC). This annual competition showcases exceptional Gunpla creations from enthusiasts worldwide, further fueling the passion for Gunpla and encouraging enthusiasts to push the boundaries of their creativity.

Today, Gunpla continues to thrive as a hobby and a significant aspect of the Gundam franchise. With an extensive range of model kits covering a vast array of Mobile Suits and designs, the hobby remains a dynamic and engaging way for fans to connect with the iconic world of Gundam and showcase their craftsmanship and artistic talents. ■

THE GUNDAM BASE TOKYO



THE GUNDAM BASE Tokyo is an official Gunpla retail store in DiverCity Tokyo Plaza, Tokyo, Japan. It is a haven for Gunpla enthusiasts and fans of the Gundam franchise, offering an extensive selection of Gunpla model kits, including various grades, scales, and limited edition releases. Even though it's located on the top floor of a shopping mall, THE GUNDAM BASE is incredibly popular; it's not uncommon for lines to form as the store opens, where you may have to wait an hour to be allowed to enter.

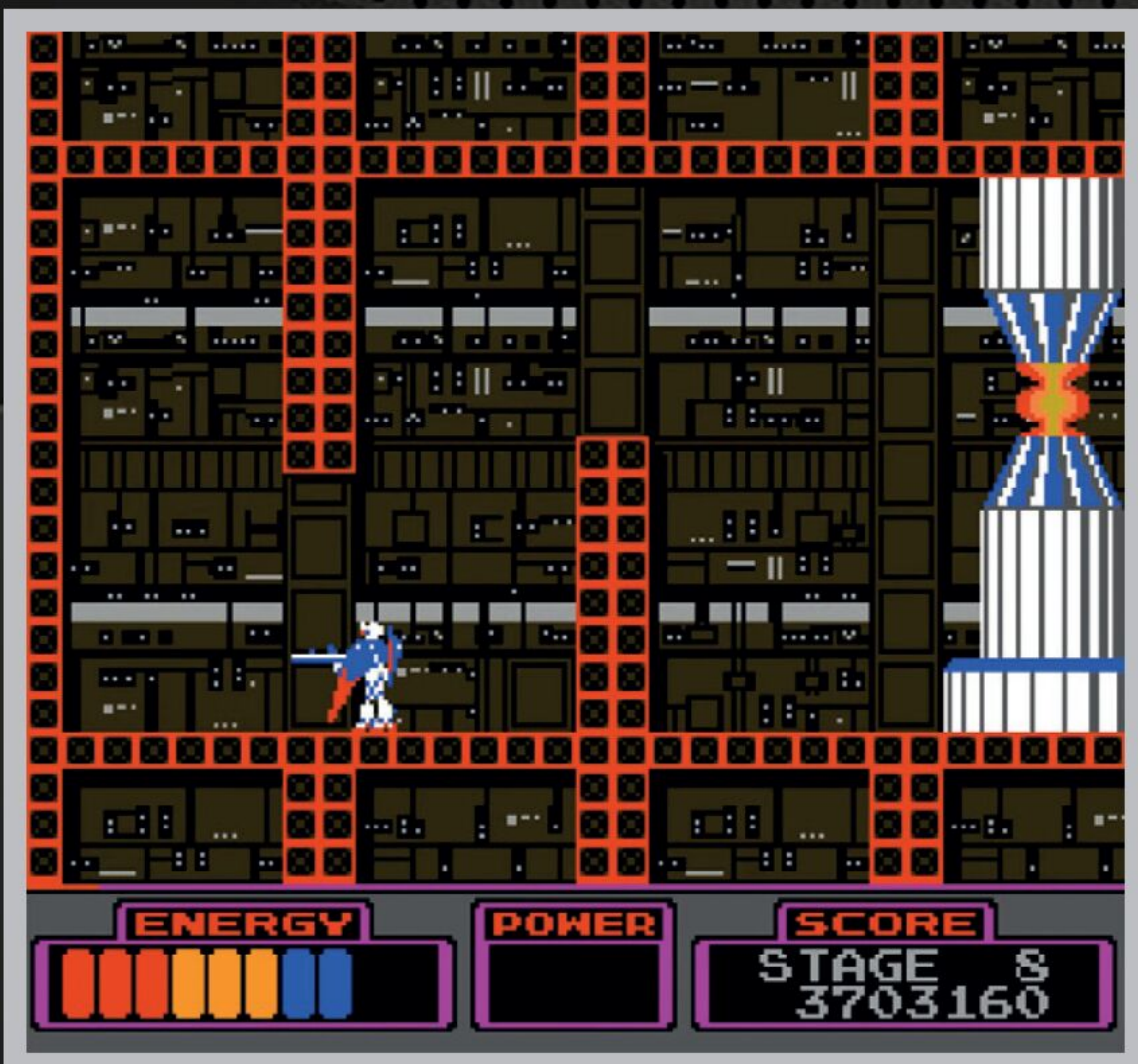
In addition to being a retail store, THE GUNDAM BASE Tokyo also features a "Build Room" where visitors can purchase Gunpla kits and build them on-site. This hands-on experience allows fans to immerse themselves in the hobby and create their personalised Gundam models. Special exhibitions, events, displays showcasing impressive Gunpla dioramas, and custom builds from talented enthusiasts are often hosted in the store, which are well worth exploring.

A bonus to any visit to THE GUNDAM BASE stands outside the main entrance to Diver City mall – another "life-size" Gundam, this time it's the RX-0 Unicorn Gundam. Not only is it huge, standing at just under twenty metres high, but it also transforms between two modes – Destroyer, where its armour closes up for battle, and Unicorn mode, which reveals its inner workings.



GUNDAM VIDEO GAMES

Gundam and video games make a perfect combination, which was not lost on publishers as there are at least 250 games based on the Gundam franchise. Here are three of our top picks should you want to get hands-on with a mobile suit yourself.

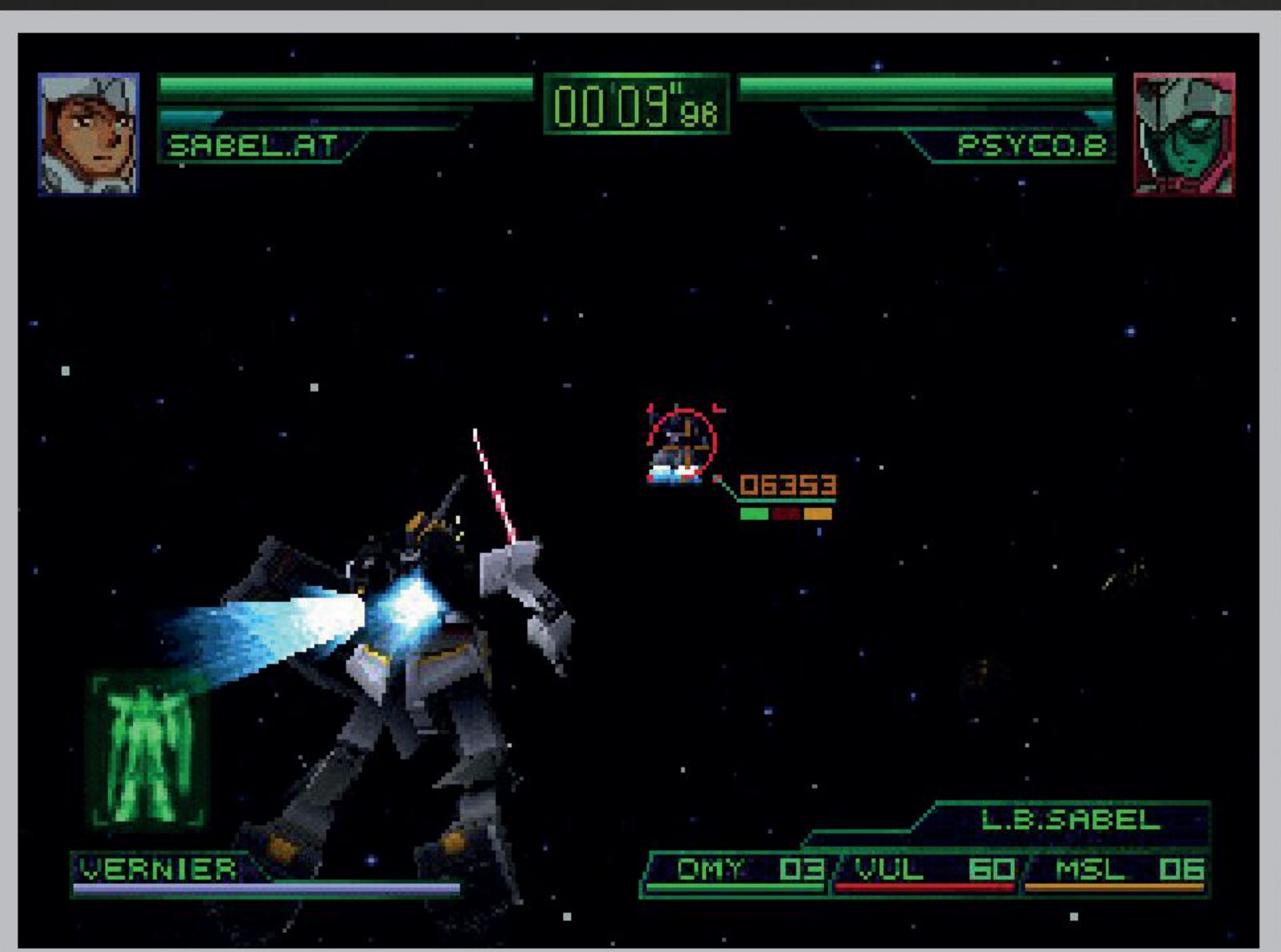


Mobile Suit Z Gundam: Hot Scramble (1986)

Released for the Famicom, *Hot Scramble* is an action-platformer that follows the events of the “Mobile Suit Z Gundam” anime series. Players control the Gundam, transforming between its humanoid and jet modes while battling enemies and bosses. The game was well-received for its challenging gameplay and faithful adaptation of the source material.

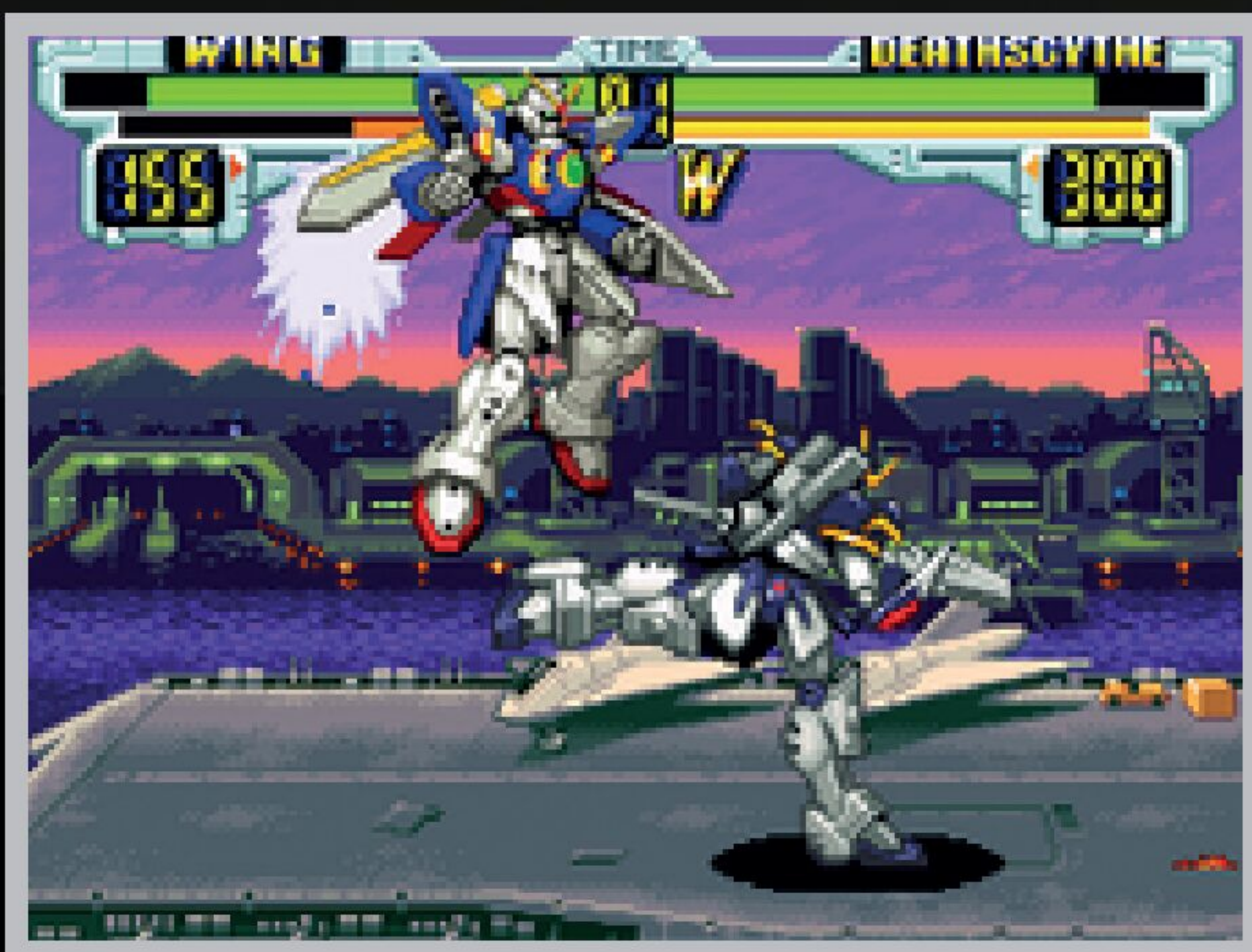
Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack (1998)

Developed for the PlayStation, this game is based on the movie “Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack.” It is a side-scrolling action game that allows players to pilot Mobile Suits like the RX-93 Nu Gundam and the MSN-04 Sazabi. The game received praise for its graphics and music and for successfully capturing the essence of the movie's storyline.



Mobile Suit Gundam Wing: Endless Duel (1996)

An exclusive Super Famicom game, *Endless Duel* is a 2D fighting game based on the “Mobile Suit Gundam Wing” anime series. Players can choose from various Gundam pilots and Mobile Suits, each with unique moves and abilities. The game's fast-paced combat and smooth animation made it a favourite among fans of both the anime and fighting games.





FUSION

Game : **Sonic Frontiers**

Year : **2022**

System : **PC, Switch, PS4/5, Xbox One/Series**

Words : **Ben Honebone**

■ I'd been eyeing up *Sonic Frontiers* since the first trailer was released, and it appealed to me because it didn't look like any *Sonic* game I'd seen previously. The cliffs, water, and grass are all rendered in a realistic-ish style rather than the traditional 'Green Hill Zone' aesthetic. The contrast of Sonic, Eggman, and the rest of the cast appearing in their standard "cute, colourful, mascot-type" form is a very pleasing blend of visual styles. Combine this with the high-speed abandon of the numerous ramps and courses spread around the game's islands, and *Frontiers* seemed very appealing, even if the reviews it received were mediocre at best. So, I thought, "Sod it, it's not my money!" and bought it (thanks, Mum).

Thankfully, *Sonic Frontiers* does everything it says on the tin. There is no gritty story here; this is children's television, complete with a wholesome, overarching moral message (like the end of a He-Man episode). Brief, non-intrusive cut scenes convey the plot as you explore the islands, and Sonic's apparent "chill" attitude to almost any plot development or opponent had me chuckling to myself more than once. Ultimately, the premise here is simple: run around each island tackling mini-courses built into the landscape or suspended in the sky, and defeat the various Guardians. Doing this will earn you keys, hearts, gears, and other cool stuff that opens Portals, bringing you closer to collecting all the Chaos Emeralds, turning yellow, and kicking all the ass in the Cyberverses.

The simple joy of boosting along ramps, bouncing off bumpers, and shooting through the air, performing tricks is compulsive. Each island has a "flow" that will keep you bouncing from course to course if you stay on the right path. Many courses take place at a high altitude, and these were among my favourite moments. The sense of scale and altitude during them was unexpectedly visceral. The Guardian boss battles are also a highlight, with several feeling genuinely thrilling when accented by *Sonic Frontiers*' superb soundtrack.

Popping my head up into the clear blue sky at breakneck speeds with Sonic and his pals has been a seriously addictive distraction. It reminded me that games don't always have to be dripping with blood or full of complicated combos for me to enjoy them. ■



BADASS BOSSES

THE FIRST AND THE FURIOUS

WORDS BY GEORGE STURGEON

■ Since the introduction of 'Badass Bosses' in issue 31 of the FUSION monthly magazine, we've covered many villains that have put up fierce fights that players remember. These bosses have all earned the title of 'Badass Boss' in their own ways, but in this issue, we wanted to recognise the important roles played by the often overlooked 'First Boss'.

These elementary evildoers come in all shapes and sizes and have been entrusted with performing some of the most crucial tasks that any video game needs to succeed. A first boss should ideally look formidable, offer a spark

of intrigue, or at least have an element of flair to grab the player's attention. It should provide a fair and balanced challenge that shouldn't be too easy nor too difficult, as frustrating the player at such an early stage could be a critical hit to their enjoyment, leading them to simply switch off!

Therefore, the first boss should be a gentle introduction to the basic gameplay or combat mechanics, delivering a worthy challenge memorable enough to pique the player's interest. The confrontation should test players' skills and prepare them for the tougher challenges that lie ahead. With this in mind, we've selected a handful of foes with attributes that we feel earn them the title of 'Badass First Boss'.



THE HOUSE OF DEAD 2

BADASS BOSS: Judgment
IN-GAME LOCATION: The First Chapter - A Prelude
DEVELOPER: Sega AM1
SYSTEM: Arcade
RELEASE YEAR: 1998

JUDGMENT

Type 28



HOLD YOUR FIRE!

The opening moments of *The House of the Dead II* introduce the player to the antagonistic imp-like creature, Zeal, who soon teams up with a headless, axe-swinging, armoured giant named Kuarl. Together, this combination of brains and brawn forms the intimidating collective known as 'Judgment.'

The cause for this confrontation sees players assume control of AMS agents James Taylor and Gary Stewart, who are dispatched to an Italian city to locate their missing colleague 'Agent G' and stop a zombie outbreak. Upon arrival, they are instantly threatened by Zeal, an imp-like fiend, who sends an army of Zombies after them. After defeating the Zombies and rescuing survivors, they eventually cross paths with Zeal again, only this time, the colossal Kuarl joins him. The player must use a sharp aim and quick reflexes to take down this seemingly invincible duo.

Judgment earns its status as a Badass First Boss due to the bizarre pairing of Zeal and Kuarl, who strike a formidable first impression through a battle strategy that combines mind and muscle. Where Zeal acts as the small, fast-moving brains of the operation, the slower and far larger Kuarl, with his impenetrable armour, provides the brawn.

BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

This confrontation is set on the streets of an Italian city. If undead freaks are looking to get the attention of the local government, then injuring one of their agents is a surefire way to get to the top of their hit list. As Zeal threatens players once more, the cars blocking the street

are suddenly swept aside by a massive suit of armour, and it's at this point players realise that their opponent isn't quite so small. Once combat commences, it quickly becomes apparent that unloading bullets toward this giant armoured foe barely makes a dent, and a more damaging weakness must be found.

As players attempt to chip away at the health bar of this behemoth, the smaller and more agile Zeal will dart around its companion, aiming to divert players' attention long enough for this seemingly invincible monster to advance, quaking the surrounding village with every step as it prepares to swing its blood-soaked axe.

Players will quickly learn that the bigger of the two isn't the primary target, as menacing as he may be. Instead, targeting Zeal by predicting the imp's movements is the way forward, as direct shots will deal heavy damage and, in parallel, cause the armoured giant to stumble backwards. Luckily, this Badass First Boss has a forgiving attack pattern, and players are given plenty of time to strike at Zeal, thanks to his predictable manoeuvres and apparent overconfidence. Patience and continued attacks on Zeal



will see Kuarl fall, at which point the tiny fiend will attack in a zig-zag pattern. Stay focused and keep firing to bring this battle to a close.

When one thinks of creatures that headline the horror genre, a headless suit of armour and an imp working together don't immediately spring to mind, but this unique pairing makes this Badass First Boss stand out. The Boss Battle against Judgment sees two lesser-known horror monsters combine their forces for a fantastically fearsome first boss – they've got your attention, now make them suffer as G did!



BADASS BOSS: Man in Red
IN-GAME LOCATION: Mission 01: Birds Of A Feather
DEVELOPER: Capcom
SYSTEM: PlayStation 3
RELEASE YEAR: 2008

DEVIL MAY CRY



Dante is the leading protagonist of the *Devil May Cry* franchise and the son of the legendary Dark Knight Sparda. This vigilante demon hunter is instantly recognisable with his iconic white hair and flowing red cape, whilst his signature weaponry, such as the Rebellion Sword and handguns 'Ebony and Ivory', make him a stylish and memorable first boss.

The cause for this confrontation sees the player take on the role of Nero, a member of the Order of the Sword, a religious organisation that worships the Dark Knight Sparda. During their prayers, Dante crashes through the roof of

Fortuna Castle's Opera House and, with a single shot, assassinates the Order's High Priest. The player must quickly leap to action to fend off this sinister opponent.

Dante earns his position as a Badass First Boss as this is the first time facing him as the antagonist. In previous instalments of *Devil May Cry*, the player assumes the role of Dante as the protagonist, so the switch to playing as Nero is a surprise for sure, but one that sets the stage for a magnificent battle, enabling the player to test their might against the series' iconic demon hunter.

BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

This showdown occurs at the Fortuna Castle's Cathedral. If Dante's devil-may-care attitude and his art for making stylish entrances have been anything to go by, then dropping through the roof of the Fortuna Castle Opera House and assassinating "His Holiness" during prayer sure is one hell of a way to crash a party! The conflict between Nero and Dante sets the stage for a memorable tutorial; as they grasp the basics of combat, the player must dodge and counter Dante's attacks. If anyone's going to show you the ropes of monster-hunting, it's Dante.

The anticipation for an all-out duel between the two only rises as impressive cutscenes break up each tutorial segment. Dante appears practically invincible to the player as he taunts and attacks Cathedral guards, pulling off some truly outlandish action sequences (if skewered soldiers are your thing).

When the health bars appear, Dante casually walks towards Nero with a nonchalant swagger before presenting a constantly moving target that will strike fast with basic 'Rebellion' Sword combos and fire handguns 'Ebony and Ivory', trying to keep you at a distance. This foe is known for his confident attitude, and he'll pressure the player to keep up during this first real test of fast-paced combat. With surprisingly swift moves for a first boss, he'll offer the player brief windows to land attacks as he mocks them



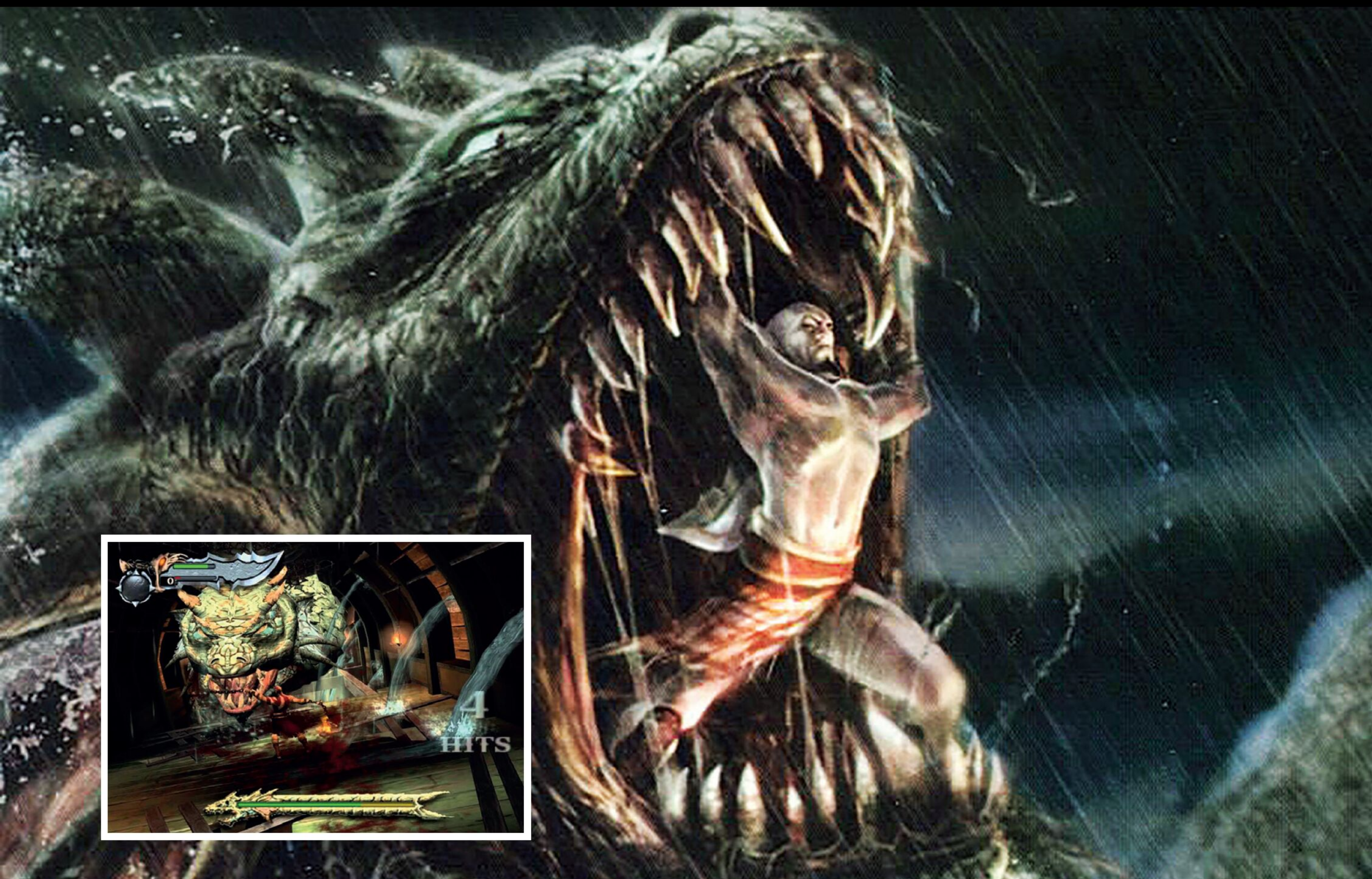
in a classic, cocky Dante fashion.

The Boss battle against Dante kicks off *Devil May Cry IV* with a "Jackpot!" as the player is taught the art of monster-hunting by the best in the business! This battle is at its best when both assailants' weaponry is evenly matched. However, if you want to make quick work of this boss and miss all of the action, Nero's Buster devil arm is at your disposal to shred Dante's health bar. But where's the fun in that?



GOD OF WAR

BADASS BOSS: Hydra
IN-GAME LOCATION: The Hydra Attacks
DEVELOPER: Santa Monica Studio
SYSTEM: PlayStation 2
RELEASE YEAR: 2005



Developed by Santa Monica Studio, the *God of War* franchise has built a reputation for its cinematic boss battles of gargantuan scale. From the start, *God of War* is content to pit the player against seemingly immeasurable odds as they're tasked with taking down The Hydra, a giant three-headed sea serpent that serves as the first boss in *God of War*.

The player assumes the role of Kratos, a Spartan warrior tasked by the god of the sea, Poseidon, to slay the Hydra. Besieging ships and feasting on sailors, this monster terrorises The Aegean Sea (Poseidon's domain), so the player must wield the Blades of Chaos to strike it down, one serpent's head at a time.

The Hydra earns its position as a Badass First Boss for delivering a fantastic cinematic show of power that undoubtedly raised the player's expectations of what an introductory

boss battle could look like. This three-headed monster provides a multi-stage battle as it tears through an entire fleet of ships, leaving fans wondering how Santa Monica Studios would eclipse this boss in the sequels.

BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

The Hydra's heads are fought individually as the player progresses through the stage. Each battle will serve to tutor the player on their basic combat moves before facing off against the beast in all its three-headed glory for one final showdown.

Taking this beast down in two stages, the player must first eliminate two Hydra heads on the ship's deck before climbing the ship's mast



to reach the brains of this terrible trio, the Hydra King.

The first stage of the battle sees this duo work together by unleashing swift attacks on the player, including biting and swinging their long necks to inflict damage. The player must defend and attack, and just when you think you have the measure of them, their icy breath drags Kratos' across the ship's deck, hampering the player's combat flow. Defeating these two heads is made harder due to their healing abilities, but persevere with the Blades of Chaos and eventual victory awaits, causing the heads to drop to the deck.



With the two heads incapacitated, only the Hydra King remains. As the largest and most terrifying of all three, this finale marks the most impressive segment of this boss battle. With limited space available, the player must battle this demon from the ship's mast as it roars in fury. The player may assume they'll know most of its moves, but the Hydra King possesses a fiercer bite with a larger radius, making it challenging to defend against with such little room to manoeuvre.

Though the odds may seem against you, finishing the Hydra with a spectacularly gore-infused quick-time-event sees Kratos drive the ship's broken mast through the beast's brain, ensuring this sea serpent gets a solid position on this list. The Hydra is a tyrannical titan that delivers such an epic battle that it flips on its head every preconceived idea of what a first boss should be.





BADASS BOSS: Straga
IN-GAME LOCATION: Mayhem
DEVELOPER: Vigil Games
SYSTEM: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
RELEASE YEAR: 2010

Straga is one of The Chosen, a group of five ancient creatures from the abyss who serve a higher hellish entity known as The Destroyer. Standing several stories tall, Straga is the strongest of The Chosen, and plays a crucial part during the apocalypse in the final battle between angels and demons.

Darksiders sees the player take on the role of War, one of the four Horsemen, a brotherhood of enforcers assigned to maintain balance in the universe. Believing he had been called to Earth to play his part in the apocalypse, War instead finds the two sides already in conflict and must now do battle against Straga.

Straga earns his position as a Badass First Boss by demonstrating apocalyptic power that cannot be ignored. The player will immediately feel at a disadvantage as they witness this gigantic beast killing the angelic leader, Abaddon, with ease. Once battle commences, the player will feel the wrath of this boss immediately and must find a way to overcome his fury.

BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

The battle with Straga occurs on Earth during the apocalypse as he emerges from a lava pool in the centre of a city street. With the modern metropolis in a state of ruin, giant red crystals erupt from the Earth, framing Straga in a

suitably hellish arena.

With cutscenes out of the way, battle commences, and it's not long before Straga tosses a handful of parked cars in War's direction, forcing the player to swerve and avoid the oncoming traffic (albeit from above) with well-timed dash manoeuvres. As Straga's anger builds, the player must also expect the rug, or in this case, the road, to quite literally be pulled out from under them, as the fiend grabs and twists the tarmac before slamming it down, causing nearby cars to explode.

Defeating this goliath will require perfect car parking, as War will need to pick them up and launch them at Straga's head precisely (or, as we like to call it, right in his front grill!). Lobbing enough cars in his direction will stun him long enough for the player to slash away at his face with the Chaoeater sword. Stay with it, as a combination of car-throwing, avoiding Straga's attacks, and taking every opportunity to unleash combos with your blade will ultimately result in success.

Despite the player's apparent victory, the balance of power soon shifts in the demon's favour, courtesy of a closing cutscene that promises an eventual rematch. This confrontation brings a biblical battle into a modern setting with spectacular results. Straga's attacks see the city setting utilised to its fullest, with his fury and fiery flair taking the meaning of road rage to new heights.

STAR WARS™ JEDI FALLEN ORDER™



BADASS BOSS: AT-ST
IN-GAME LOCATION: Derelict Hangar
DEVELOPER: Respawn Entertainment
SYSTEM: PlayStation 4/5, Xbox One/Series, PC
RELEASE YEAR: 2019



The AT-ST is an iconic vehicle of the Star Wars franchise and an equally important piece of the Galactic Empire's Military Forces. First Seen in 1980's *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, the All-Terrain Scout Transport has since made numerous other appearances throughout the series, with one of its latest being the first boss battle in *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order*.

The Empire, having tracked our hero, Cal Kestis, to Planet Zeffo, sends an AT-ST to attack the crew of the Stinger Mantis to get Cal's attention and draw him out. Now, the safety of the Mantis crew rests on the player's shoulders as they must rescue their companions by engaging the AT-ST in combat and taking it down.

The AT-ST earns its position as a Badass First Boss for allowing the player to battle one of The Empire's most famous pieces of military hardware. Whilst a tutorial battle with the Second Sister and an optional encounter with Oggdo Bogdo can occur before this confrontation, the AT-ST marks the first true boss players will find.

As this towering machine is designed to eliminate ground-based targets, the fact that the player must face this challenge on foot makes for a thrilling first test of their skills. With such a large encounter, the player is encouraged to experiment with the different applications for their Lightsaber and new Force powers to emerge victorious.



BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

The Derelict Hangar sets the stage for the battle against the AT-ST. As the player approaches the landing pad, the unmistakable screeches of blaster fire in the distance get louder, signalling to Star Wars fans that an imminent battle awaits.

Equipped with three main attack methods, the walker will fire at the player with chin-mounted blaster cannons, whilst its side cannons can deploy rockets and scatter concussion grenades on the ground to protect its underside. This mechanical menace clearly has advantages due to its height and arsenal of weapons, but the iconic machine is not without its weak points that the player can exploit. As the AT-ST puts the player under immense pressure with constant blaster

shots, you can't help but feel that its attacks are designed to keep Cal at bay. Like its bigger brother, the AT-AT walker, seen in other Star Wars games and films, these towering contraptions can be brought down by attacking those huge mechanical legs.

Claiming victory over the AT-ST can be achieved in multiple ways, with the more cautious player carefully and strategically parrying laser blasts and rockets back in the AT-ST's direction with good use of the Lightsaber and Force powers. For those brave enough, the most effective plan of attack is to get in close and strike away at the legs with the Lightsaber. It carries more risk due to the concussion grenades, but it's incredibly efficient if luck is on your side.

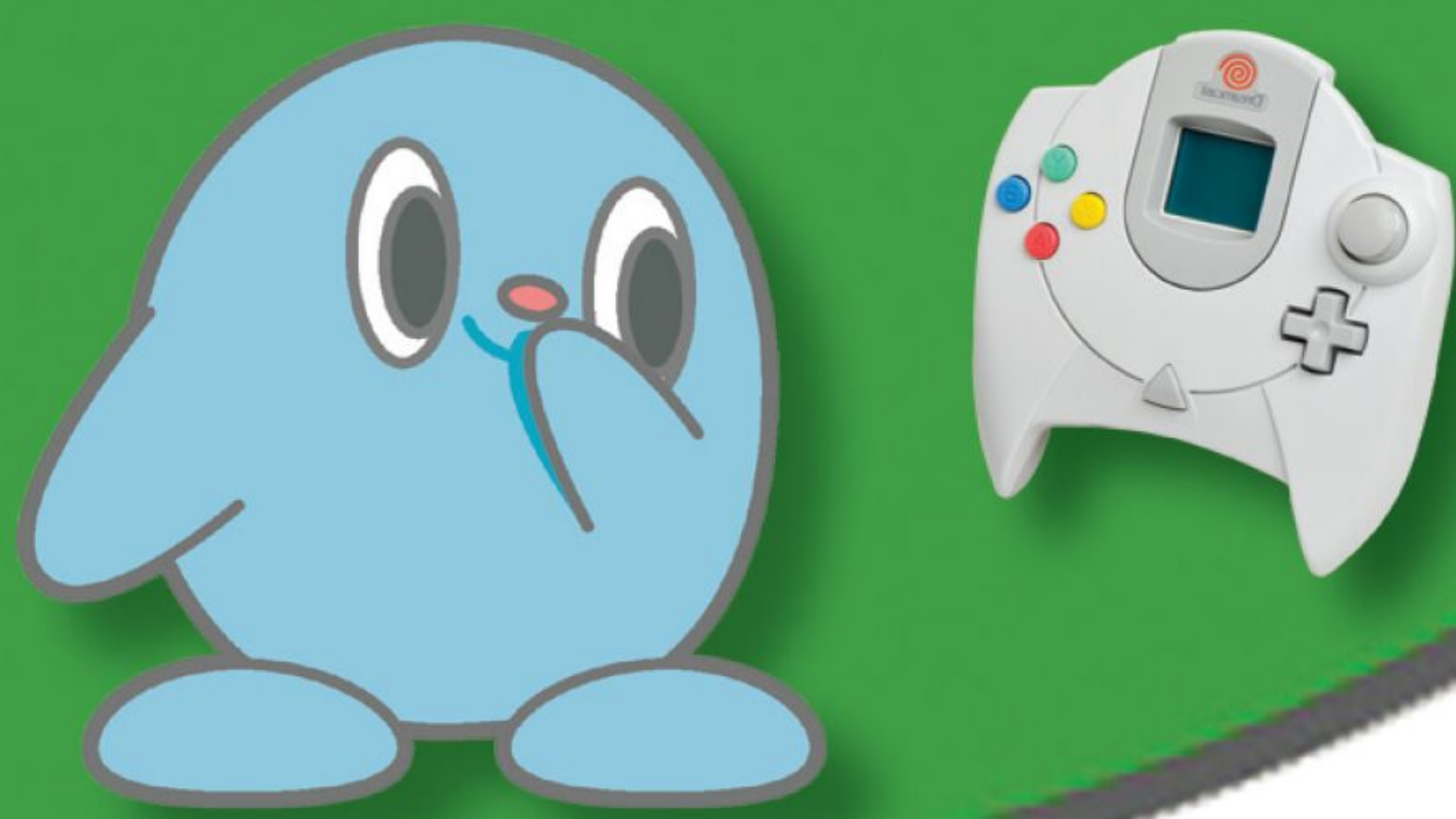
Once the AT-ST collapses, the pilot slowly crawls from the wreckage - nothing that a quick



swing of the Lightsaber can't handle. However, if you don't take him out immediately, the coward runs and hides, taking potshots at you from the shadows, which is laughable because we all know what poor shots they are!

The Empire's array of machines is vast, but the AT-ST remains one of their most memorable. From the moment it appears to the iconic 'pew-pew' sounds of its lasers, this battle is a well-crafted nostalgic nod for fans of the Star Wars classics. ■

10 Dreamcast games you may have missed.



EVERY CONSOLE HAS ITS DEFINING GAMES, AND THE DREAMCAST HAS ITS FAIR SHARE OF CLASSICS. FAITH JOHNSON LOOKS AT TEN GAMES WORTHY OF YOUR ATTENTION, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT WIDELY CONSIDERED THE CONSOLE'S BEST OFFERINGS.

Giga Wing

The Dreamcast is well-known as a shoot-'em-up fan's paradise, and *Giga Wing*, although basic in its scoring and weapon system, oozes quality at every turn. This one will not pose much of a challenge to hardened shooter veterans, but it's still fun, and a real feast for the eyes. There are four characters to choose from, each with their own ship and storyline. They also have three types of attacks that all have different uses depending on the enemies on screen. A simple-but-effective blaster, it's worthy of a playthrough, especially if you can team up with a friend.



Metropolis Street Racer

Probably the best-known one on this list, *Metropolis Street Racer* is the spiritual precursor to the excellent *Project Gotham* series on Xbox. This slick racer features real-world roads set in London, Tokyo, and San Francisco, and uses a unique Kudos system to rate your driving. It's not just cool features on offer here; the actual racing and cars are simulated to a high standard, and there are many modes to keep your wheel spinning for a long while. *Metropolis Street Racer* also uses the Dreamcast's internal clock to add day and night features that were mind-blowing at the time of release.



Skies of Arcadia

The JRPG selection on the Dreamcast is thin, but a few gems were released. *Skies of Arcadia* shines as an example of great storytelling, excellent presentation, and deep character development. Set in a fantasy world of pirates, knights, and monsters, you lead your team to take down an evil clan of rebels. One of the best aspects of the gameplay is flying a giant airship, shaped like a pirate ship, between the six different worlds. If flying a pirate ship around the skies wasn't fun enough, you can use the Dreamcast's racing wheel to control it!



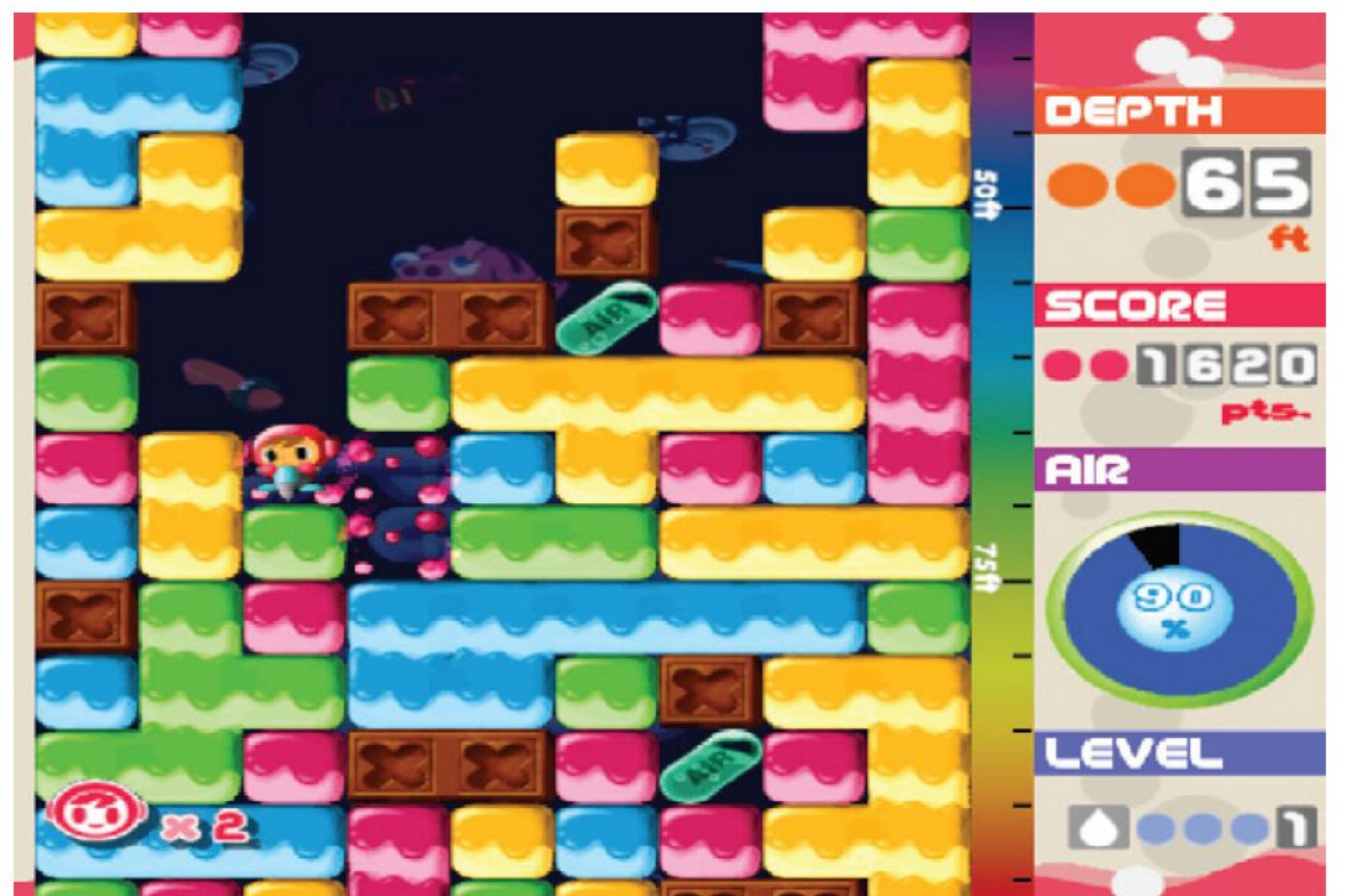
Blue Stinger

Although it received poor reviews at the time, *Blue Stinger* has found a cult following in recent years. Set around a dome-covered island, following a meteorite crash, where monsters run wild. You take control of Eliot and Dogs, who must uncover the mystery. The gameplay comprises weapons-based combat and beat-'em-up sections when not using your guns. It plays much like other horror survival games from the time, including all the story tropes of an evil corporation that needs to be deposed.



Mr. Driller

The spiritual successor to *Dig Dug*, *Mr. Driller*, sees you on a mission to dig, dig, and dig some more. It's a classic action puzzle title with gorgeous graphics and sounds that pop. The aim of each level is to reach the bottom of the screen by digging out the blocks that will fall as you create spaces. It's a perfect blend of risk and reward as you race against the high score tables. If the falling blocks that can squash you weren't enough to deal with, your oxygen tank continuously depletes as well. Make sure that you grab the extra air tanks.



Record of Lodoss War

Based on the anime of the same name, *Record of Lodoss War* is a classy action RPG title that plays similarly to *Diablo*. After being resurrected by a wizard, he commands you to defeat Cardice, a goddess hell-bent on destroying everything. The main gameplay feature is exploration mixed with hack and slash while uncovering the story. You use a system of collecting metals and objects that you present to the blacksmith, who then upgrades your character. Its simple approach meant that it was overlooked on release, but there is a solid RPG title here that fans of the genre should investigate.



Sega GT

Sega's answer to the all-conquering *Gran Turismo*, *Sega GT*, is a realistic racing simulation featuring 130 different cars. Each car is designed to drive as it would in the real world, and along with realistic tracks, this is a real departure from Sega's usual arcade racers. As well as the normal licenses, racing, and cups, you can build a car from scratch using parts won from the main game. This game has been criminally overlooked, primarily due to *Gran Turismo*'s popularity, but any racing simulation fan should be giving this a go.



Sword of the Berserk

Based on the anime *Berserk*, this one has found a following long after its release. Featuring beautiful graphics and tight hack and slash gameplay, *Sword of the Berserk* is one of the Dreamcast's best games. It's also challenging, but those who persevere will be rewarded with a fantastic journey with entertaining gameplay. Quick-time events determine your path through the game, and failing specific tasks will result in a different ending, so there is lots of replay value. This game is perfect for those seeking a blend of mindless fighting and in-depth storytelling.



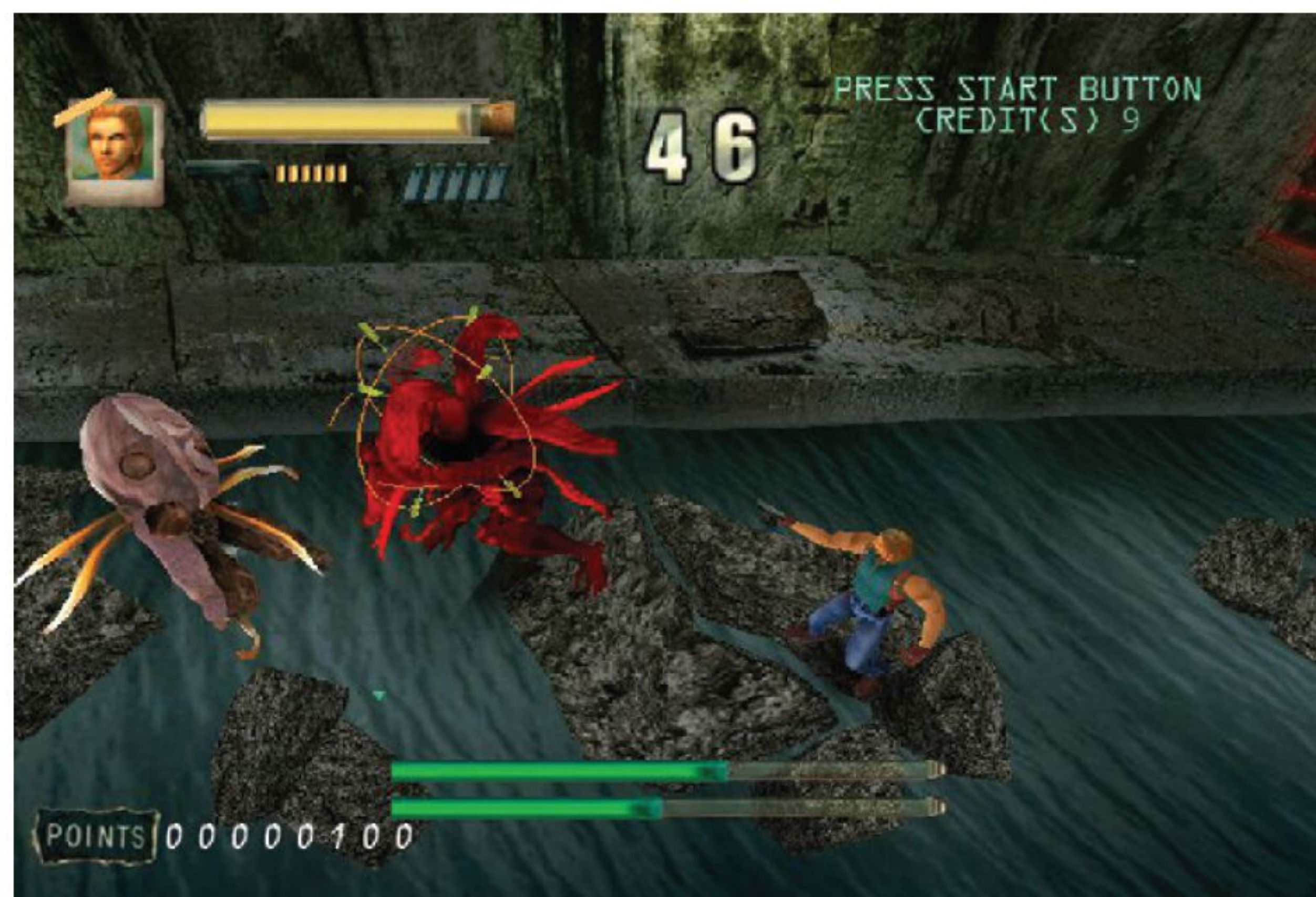
Toy Commander

In true Toy Story fashion, the toys in Andy's room have rebelled against the new army toys. You must use helicopters, tanks, and planes to take them down and save the day. This fun action game includes puzzle levels and straight-up shooting elements; some missions require you to race, while others are stealth-based. Each level ends with a boss controlling a different part of the house. There are some spectacular set pieces spread throughout *Toy Commander*, but its difficulty lets it down. The fun multiplayer, however, offers a great distraction.



Zombie Revenge

Taking the survival horror genre and turning it into a 3D beat 'em-up, *Zombie Revenge* is as silly as it is fun. You can use many items from the scenery to whack the undead in this *House of the Dead* spin-off. You take control of one of three main characters; each has its strengths and weaknesses. The combat is basic but enjoyable, and each level ends with a challenging boss fight. *Zombie Revenge* can be completed quickly, but the added Battle Mode means you can take on your mates for some party game fun.



FUSION REACTOR

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF GAMING.

THE FUSION TEAM

GAMING IS ~~FUN~~ HARD WORK AND THE FUSION TEAM DOES A LOT OF IT EVERY YEAR.



Faith Johnson:

I've had a varied year in my gaming journey comprising lots of retro (of course) and a host of indie goodness that has excited me. But what really stands out is how much gaming conventions and the communities around them have sprung back after the pandemic. Shows of all shapes and sizes have seen my friends and colleagues reunite for the first time in a long while. It was all doom and gloom for me as event after event was cancelled, but now the restrictions have been lifted, and we see many events coming back and new ones appearing. It's wonderful to see, and long may it continue, as there is nothing quite like a big day out playing games, rustling through stalls, and listening to industry legends tell their stories on stage.



George Sturgeon:

Looking back on the past year, I'm pleased to be part of the Fusion team as we all produce such a brilliant variety of articles between us. A highlight for me has been the development of our recurring series, as they have given the team a great platform to shout about some of the best bits gaming has to offer. Working on these has also provided the perfect excuse to explore game genres out of my comfort zone while searching for new Super Stages, Badass Bosses, and Musical Marvels.



Paul Twist:

This has been my first full year of writing for Fusion magazine and its sister site, Fusion R Gamer, for which I contribute a news story or review every weekday. By writing about games, I've finally fulfilled a childhood dream of



mine, proving my school's careers advisor wrong almost thirty years after she advised me against pursuing video game journalism.

It's also been the year that I finally stopped visiting my *Animal Crossing New Horizons* island (Splendid) daily, though I still pop back if I'm awake in time for turnips on Sundays! Adding golf to *Switch Sports* extended the lifespan of a game I already loved, and I'm still playing now. 2023's biggest new releases for me were *Super Mario Bros. Wonder* and *Street Fighter VI*, the latest instalments in two of my all-time favourite series.



Andrew Fisher:

It's been a difficult year, personally, so I am glad that games give me an escape. The best has been *Powerwash Simulator*, thanks to its free and paid updates offering so much extra gameplay and cleverly written scripts. And, of course, I could not miss out on the pinball action of *Demon's Tilt*. Otherwise, I have spent a lot of time researching new homebrew for old computers and consoles for my Retro Gamer column and writing a new book to be published early in 2024. Stay tuned!

COLD

PARTIAL REACTIVITY

NEUTRON FLUX

FUSION



Fusion Retro



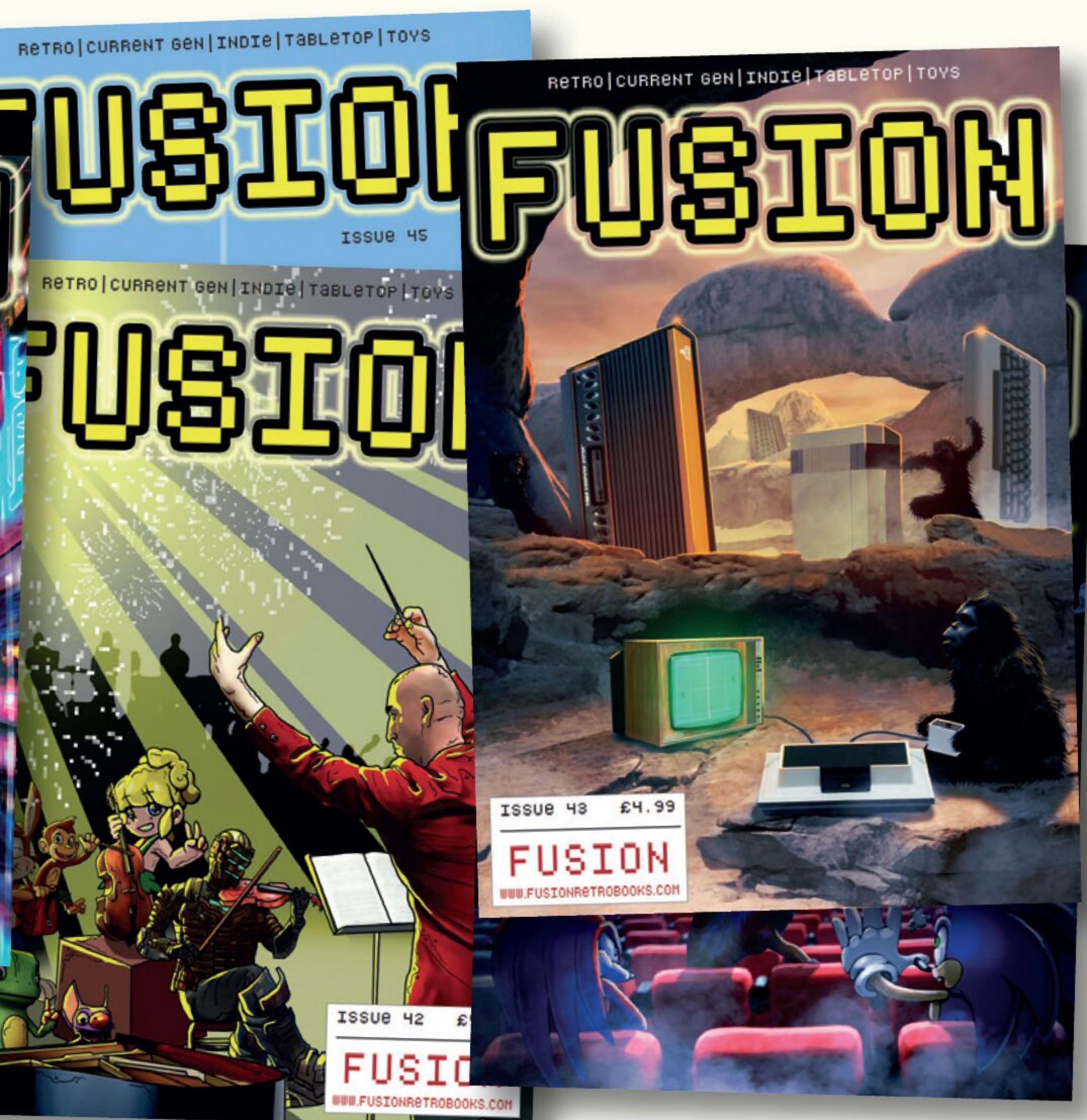
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laughs), and *The Mystery of Woolley Mountain* was a spiffing jaunt. Best of all, though, was *Lucy Dreaming*, the Airplane of point-and-click adventures, where every screen and interaction chucked jokes at you in a riotously British psychological tale. The genre has been immensely popular with small-scale and indie developers, and as the last twelve months have proven, fans have never had it so good.

**Toy Polloi:**

I've had a great year with my vintage toy collecting and have been able to finish many toy restoration projects I hadn't thought possible. Like many collectors, there are grail items that I one day hope to find and add to my collection but don't ever expect to see at a price I can afford. But, sometimes, you just get lucky. This year I have managed to tick at least one grail item from my list and added a least four more back onto it, which is a good thing. If I reach the end of my list, what will I collect?

**Alan Hammerton:**

Thinking back over the last year, I've realised that it was the year I rediscovered the Switch. I bought mine back in 2018, mainly to pass some time on long flights I knew I would be taking. I bought the usual *Mario* and *Zelda* games, which I enjoyed, but something just didn't click, and I didn't pick up my Switch for the next few years. The new *Lego Star Wars* game dragged me back, and I haven't looked back since; the Switch is now my favourite console, and I use it daily as I work through all of Travellers Tale's games.

**Andrew Oyston:**

It's been the year of the point-and-click adventure for me. *Return to Monkey Island* demonstrated that people still wanted to hang with Guybrush, and classic British folk horror saw an unearthing in *The Excavation of Hob's Barrow*. *Lord Winklebottom Investigates* brought whimsy to the fore (as well as some

**Ben Honebone:**

It's been a fantastic year for gaming, and I expect to be working my way through the list of interesting games that arrived in 2023 for some time. The continuing development of *Portal* on the N64 by James Lambert has been a highlight. I've eagerly awaited each new game build and have enjoyed his development diaries on YouTube. James' work bringing Valve's classic Source Engine game to the N64 is an impressive technical feat and a joy to behold.

2023 has also been my first year as the editor of FUSION, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. It's been my good fortune to continue building on the solid foundation Chris Wilkins and Alan Hammerton laid down, and I look forward to putting the magazine together each month and interacting with a fantastic team. I sincerely hope I'll still be here in another year, discussing how great 2024 was. ■

THAT MOMENT WHEN...



I AM THE GREAT



***YOU MEET THE
GREAT MIGHTY POO
CONKERS BAD FUR DAY (2001)***

GREAT MIGHTY POO



THANK YOU TO ALL THE SUBSCRIBERS OF THE CHANNEL, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

WE NEED YOU

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GOD SAVE THE GENTLEMAN



THE FUTURE IS RETRO

NOT JUST FOR MEN

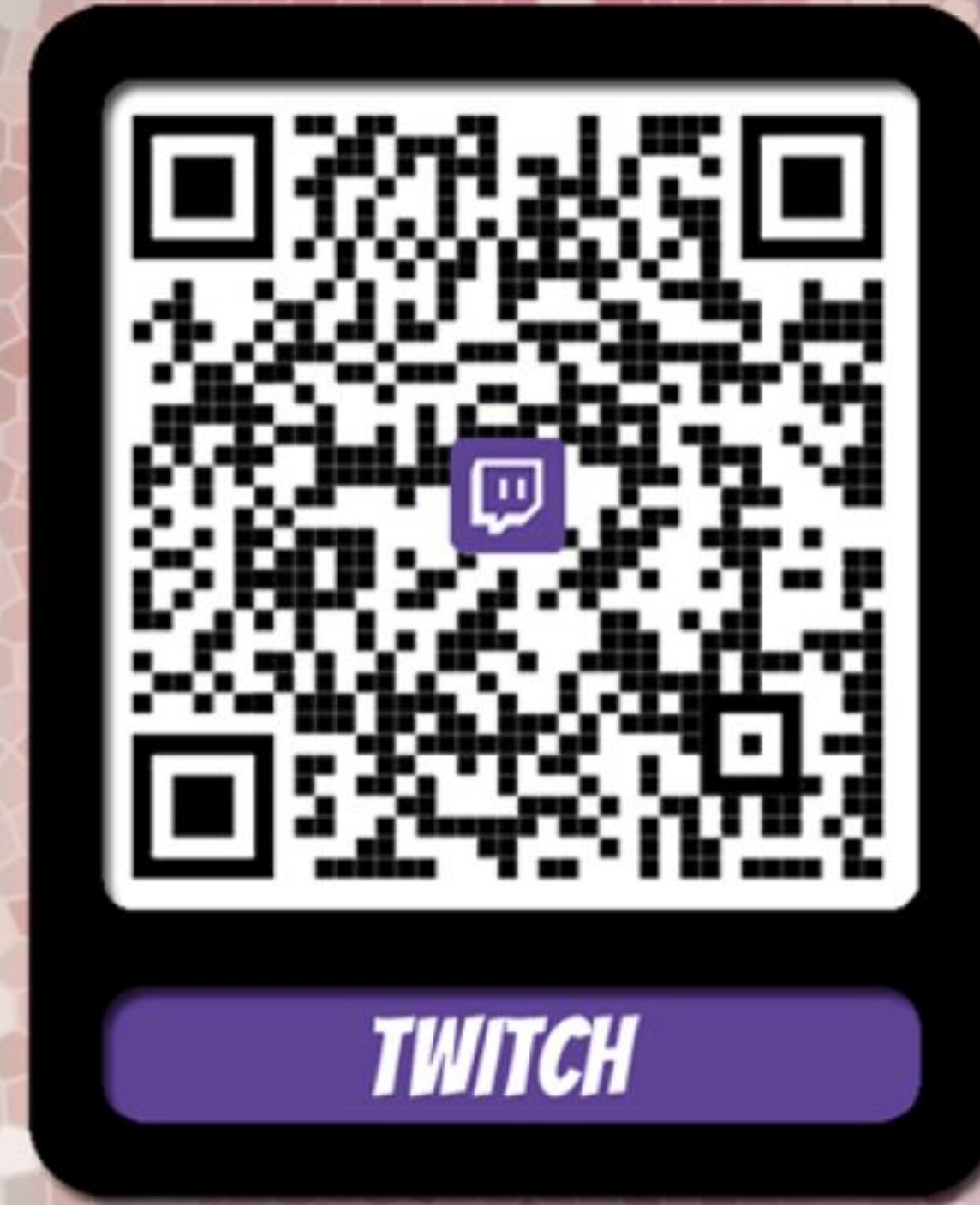
THE FUTURE IS RETRO



X



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